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ABSTRACT

In the 1990s, educational policy in Finland shifted to decentralization and the granting of more local control to municipalities and schools, with the intent of encouraging more active, locally relevant learning. Within national guidelines, schools develop their own curricula and do their own budgeting. Case studies examine how three different kinds of schools have interpreted the national core curriculum in the development of their school-based curriculum, how their plans were implemented, and what the outcomes were. The first case study examines the connections between curriculum change and school culture in a small rural school. In this school, the development and implementation of the curriculum influenced teacher views of knowledge, learning, and education in a more progressive direction, but this change was not reflected in actual teaching practice to any great extent. The next case study involved an urban school of 186 pupils in which curriculum development was ongoing and well developed. The study focused on curriculum leadership and the roles of different persons in the development of the school-based curriculum, teacher commitment to the curriculum, and the evaluation of the curriculum. The third case study examines a suburban school with 184 pupils. Interviewees felt that developing the curriculum had increased cooperation among the staff, who were satisfied with it and felt it to be their own. However, their attempt at merging behaviorist and constructivist methods was unsuccessful--teachers seemed unable to break out of their traditional teacher-centered approach. This book includes overviews of the Finnish educational system and the system's new administrative culture. (Contains 124 references.) (TD)

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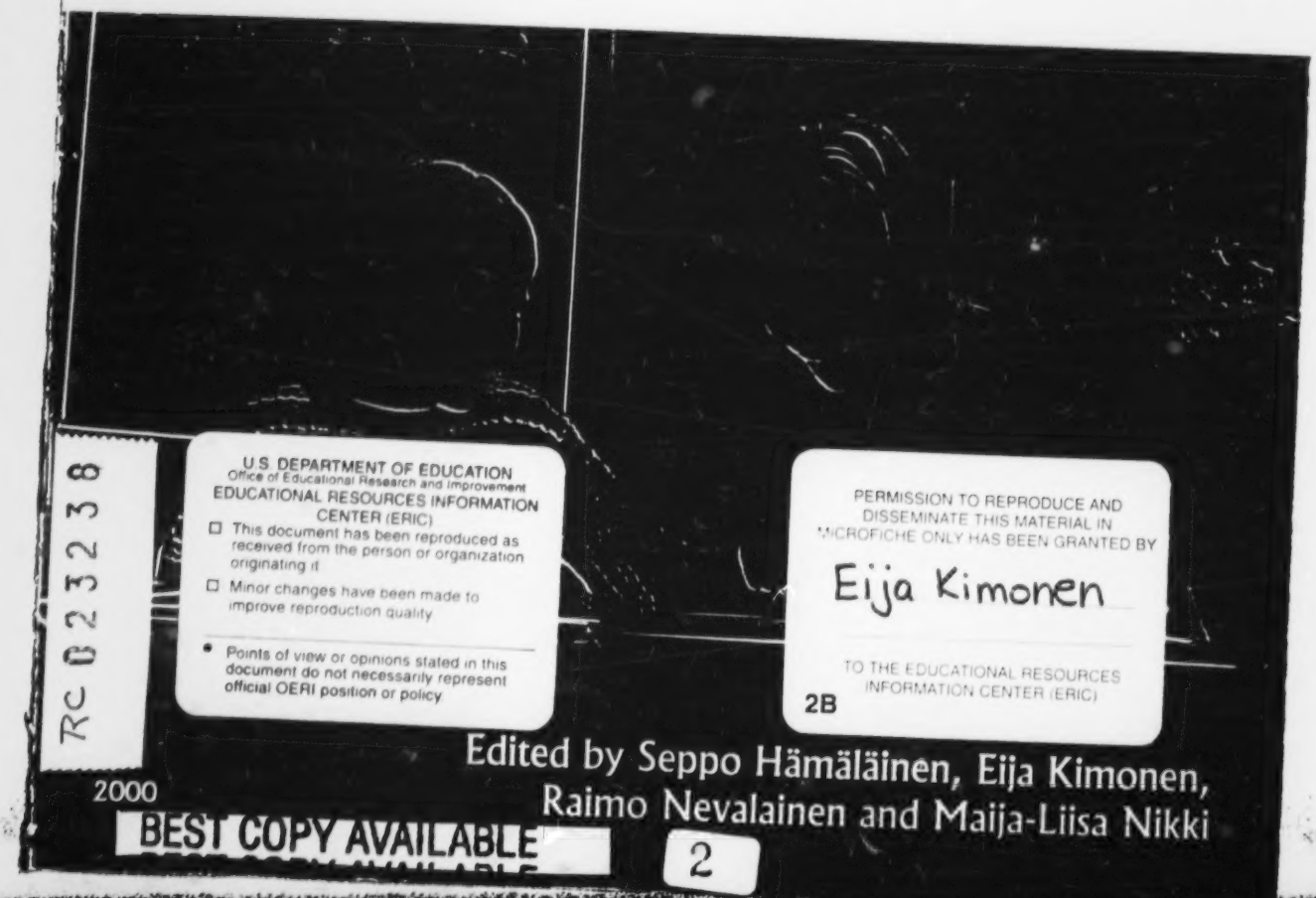
CONSENSUS OR COMPROMISE?

Making the School-based Curricula in Lower-level Comprehensive Schools in Finland



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Edited by Seppo Hämäläinen, Eija Kimonen,
Raimo Nevalainen and Maija-Liisa Nikki

University of Jyväskylä. Department of Teacher Education
Research 68

Consensus or compromise: making the school-based curricula in lower-level comprehensive schools in Finland

Edited by
Seppo Hämäläinen, Eija Kimonen,
Raimo Nevalainen and Maija-Liisa Nikki

Jyväskylä 2000

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PREFACE

The purpose of this report is to describe the background for the curriculum change which took place in comprehensive schools in Finland in 1994, and to present the central ideas of the national Framework Curriculum document. The report also deals with the ways in which three different kinds of schools have interpreted the basic elements of the curriculum. The "interpretation" of the curriculum refers to the way a school has used its freedom and opportunities in the creation of the school-based written curriculum. In addition, it refers to the outcome of the plan and to the way it was implemented by the school.

The present study is a sequel to a previous OECD-project called Active Learning (see Hämäläinen & Häkkinen 1995; Kimonen & Nevalainen 1995). At the same time it is an essential part of a joint project, A Comparative Analysis of Curriculum Change in Primary Schools in England and Finland (see Webb, R. & Vulliamy, G. with Häkkinen, K., Hämäläinen, S., Kimonen, E., Nevalainen, R. & Nikki, M.-L. 1997). The research project was carried out during 1994-1996 using the case study method. Observations, interviews and the analysis of documentation were used as the means of collecting data.

In the first chapter, The Research Context in Finland, Maija-Liisa Nikki describes the educational policy on which the curriculum changes dealt with by the study were based. The beginning of the chapter, which is especially intended for foreign readers, comprises a short historical overview of the development of compulsory education in Finland - from a parallel educational system to comprehensive school - and of the structure of the present educational system in Finland.

The National Board of Education, together with educational legislation direct school work and the way it is organized. Extensive changes in legislation concerning the whole of society and education took place during the conduct of the study; and these changes are in the process of creating a new administrative culture for schools. Maija-Liisa Nikki discusses the necessity for schools to change their administrative culture to a system emphasizing accountability and quality. In addition she discusses briefly the reform of the curriculum system and the still

ongoing in-service-training program for teachers which started in the early 1970s, when the comprehensive school was created.

In the second chapter, Curriculum Changes and School Culture in a Small Rural School: Which Way forward?, Eija Kimonen and Raimo Nevalainen describe the connections between curriculum change and school culture as seen in a small rural school in Finland. The goal is to examine the effect of change on the planning, implementation and assessment of school work, and on the teaching carried out by the teacher. The qualitative development of a small rural school will be studied from the point of view of the school's context, resources, processes and products. Development of the curriculum began in Lahdelma School in 1994. During the research period in May 1995, the teachers were in the process of writing the first draft of the proposed new curriculum.

In the third chapter, The Curriculum Process in Mäkilampi School, Kirsti Häkkinen presents a case study of a small town school with 186 pupils in which the school-based curriculum work was going on at full speed, and well-developed. The analysis was focussed on three central themes: curriculum leadership and the roles of different persons in the development of the school-based curriculum; teachers' commitment to the curriculum and the evaluation of the curriculum.

In the fourth chapter, Teachers on a Collision Course - The Kids are Having the Day off, Seppo Hämäläinen describes the curriculum change in a suburban school with 184 pupils. The implementation of the school-based curriculum work was new in that school, and only taking its first steps. Four key areas of observation and interpretation were focussed on in this case study of curriculum change in Vaara School. First, an attempt to merge two approaches to teaching: behaviourist and constructivist. Second, solidarity towards changes in teachers' careers; thirdly, communicative and strategic features in the management of change; and finally, different ways of interpreting the planning process.

The report was written with Finnish readers in mind, but also with an eye to foreign readers, especially research colleagues in England, and the many exchange students for whom the report is useful as learning material. This is the reason why some school visits have been described in greater detail than would have been necessary with only Finnish readers in mind.

We would like to express our warmest thanks to the case-study schools: to the pupils and their parents, to the teachers and to the rest of the school staff. The co-operation and helpfulness we encountered in the schools was outstanding. Our school visits were enjoyable. We would like to thank the many persons in the Teacher Education Department of the University of Jyväskylä who have helped us in the preparation of the report. Our colleagues Dr. Rosemary Webb and Dr. Graham Vulliamy at the University of York have been irreplaceable coworkers during the various stages of the study, as early as from its beginning. We have learned a great deal from them. Several persons have contributed to the English translation and editing of the text: Ms. Anneli Haimi, Ms. Jo Soden and Mr. Bill Soden. Our warmest thanks to them all. We are grateful for the financial support for the study we have received from the Finnish Academy, the Ministry of Education, and the National Board of Education.

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THE RESEARCH CONTEXT IN FINLAND

Maija-Liisa Nikki

1 THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN FINLAND

1.1 A Brief History of the Developments in the Finnish Educational System

Until the beginning of the 1970s, Finland had two parallel educational systems of compulsory education. Finnish children started their compulsory education at the age of 7 in primary schools. The first four years were the same for all children. At the end of the fourth school year, their parents had to make a choice. There were two alternatives to choose from. The first choice was that the child would continue to study two more years in primary school and after that three years in a civic school.

The other choice for the child was to enter a grammar school. The grammar school consisted of grades 1 to 8, but pupils could leave school after the fifth year at the age of 15. From this age some of the students continued their studies in grammar school, some in vocational institutions, and the rest went straight to work. At the end of the eighth year, grammar school students took the national matriculation exam in order to continue their studies at a university.

Grammar schools arranged an entrance examination and, previously, when there were far more applicants than grammar schools could enrol, competition for entrance was hard, especially in some areas of the country. Most of the children who were talented enough to pass the entrance exam left primary school after their fourth year, but some children after the fifth or even the sixth year. Because of the national policy that municipalities could establish lower secondary schools of their own, the number of grammar schools had considerably increased until the

beginning of the 70s. In most cases, those schools consisted of grades 1 to 5 for children of 10 to 15 years of age.

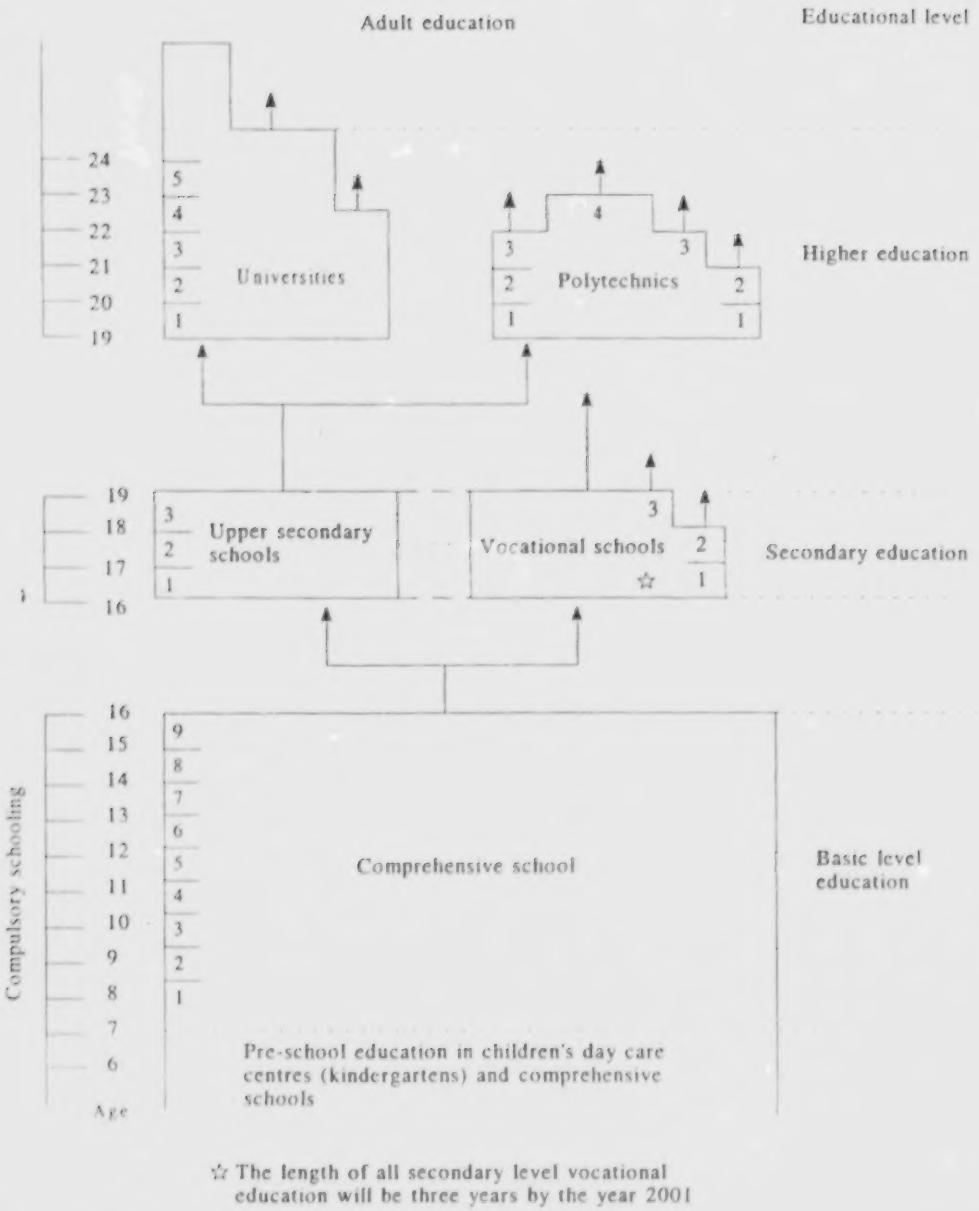
The parallel education system had many disadvantages. Parents had to choose the educational career for their child as early as the age of ten. The system divided children into two categories, those who were academically talented and those who were not. Many studies prove that parents from lower educational or socioeconomic backgrounds chose lower schooling for their children (e.g. Ritvanen 1971; Kankainen 1982; Leimu, Oravainen & Saari 1978). This trend was also seen in parents' choices between grammar school and civic school in the parallel system. The curriculum in the civic school was based on practical subjects whereas the curriculum of grammar school as well as that of the municipal secondary school were based on academic subjects. Another difference was that in those academically oriented schools, students had to study foreign languages as compulsory subjects, usually starting with the second domestic language, Swedish, and then one foreign language. There are two official languages in Finland, Finnish, and Swedish, with 94 per cent of the population speaking Finnish as their native language and roughly 6 per cent Swedish (Statistical Yearbook of Finland 1998).

Because of the increase of municipal secondary schools, there were nearly as many grammar schools and lower level municipal secondary schools as there were children willing to enter until the end of the 60s. At the same time, the big national political debate grew around demands to abolish the dividing system of the two parallel educational lines and to raise the standard of education in the nation continued. Several national committees had worked in the 60s drawing up suggestions for reform in compulsory education. Accompanied with efforts made by political and social powers concerning the whole national educational system the most important reform in the country drawing up the comprehensive school system began.

Based on these reforms, Finland received a unified comprehensive system that was first tested and then gradually introduced beginning in 1972 from the northern part of the country and ending in 1977 in the southern part. The objectives set for primary education were laid down in the Principles of Comprehensive School Act (Koulujärjestelmälaki 1968) and from 1983 onwards in the Comprehensive School Act (Peruskoululaki 1983). Comprehensive school comprised the compulsory education for children between the ages of 7 and 15.

1.2 The Present Educational System in Finland

The regular educational system in Finland (see Figure 1) contains the comprehensive school, the upper secondary school, vocational schools and professional education institutions and the universities. New polytechnics have initially operated on an experimental basis since 1991, and most of them have now acquired permanent status. They have been formed from the former colleges of higher vocational education.



☆ The length of all secondary level vocational education will be three years by the year 2001

FIGURE 1 The Finnish educational system (modified according to Lehtisalo and Raivola 1999)

Pre-school education is not compulsory in Finland, and there are no actual pre-schools in the Finnish educational system. Pre-school education is provided to 6-year-olds mainly in day-care centres, but also in pre-school groups attached to some comprehensive schools. Though this education is optional, about 60 per cent of 6-year-olds participate in pre-school education (The Development of Education 1996), some 2 per cent of which is given in comprehensive schools (Comprehensive School in Finland 1995). The administration of day-care is under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Parents are charged a fee for day-care whereas pre-primary education in comprehensive school is free of charge. The new Government (Hallituksen ohjelma 1999) has decided that a free pre-primary education for all 6-year-olds will be provided starting from August 2001. At the moment, a systematic 2-year pre-primary education is provided for severely handicapped children, for whom the compulsory education begins one year earlier than for other children.

In Finland, the comprehensive school is intended for the whole age group. Every Finn has to complete their comprehensive schooling. Alternatively, they may acquire an equivalent education elsewhere though this practice happens very rarely. The compulsory school age begins in the autumn of the year when the child turns seven and continues for ten years. In 1997, there were approximately 66 000 7-year-olds in Finland (Koulutuksen kuva 1997). In general, it takes nine years to complete the comprehensive school.

Until the beginning of the year 1999, the first six grades formed the lower stage and grades seven to nine the upper stage in the comprehensive school. The administrative and functional dividing line between the lower and upper stage has now been abolished by the new educational legislation (Perusopetuslaki 1998). A comprehensive school may offer an extra optional tenth grade for the students who have already completed their compulsory education. In grades 1–6, instruction is given mainly by class teachers and in grades 7–9 by subject teachers.

The school year begins in August and ends in May or early June. In comprehensive schools, the school year comprises 190 working days and the number of weekly lessons for pupils varies between 19 and 32 depending on the grade and the number of optional subjects, in grades 1–6 between 19 and 24

Special education is arranged for pupils who have difficulties keeping up with others owing to a physical or developmental disability or who have learning difficulties arising from emotional or other disorders.

Special education is offered either as part-time studies in connection with comprehensive school studies or in special education classes.

In Finland, post-compulsory education consists of general upper secondary education and vocational education. Over 50 per cent of youngsters aged 17–18 who have completed the comprehensive school continue in upper secondary school and over 30 per cent in vocational institutions (Education in Finland 1999, 144–145). Some of the youngsters take the extra tenth grade or try to find a job.

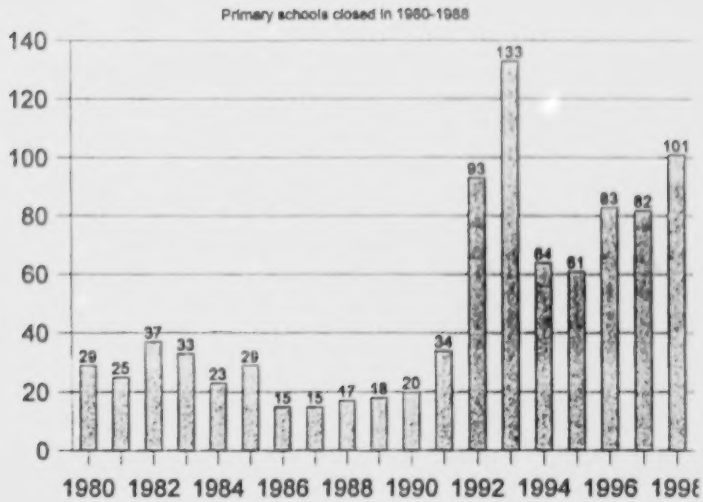


FIGURE 2 Primary schools closed in 1980-1998 (Education in Finland 1999, 26)

In addition, the number of students in apprenticeship training will be increased according to the Government's Development Plan (1996).

In 1996 there were only 34 private comprehensive schools in Finland (The Education System of Finland 1997 1998, 65). These schools are mainly maintained by internationally recognised educational organisations or by religious organisations. In 1997 only 0.8 per cent of all children of compulsory school age were in private education, either at home or in private schools (Education in Finland 1999, 24).

Due to Finland's low population, comprehensive schools are usually relatively small. Regional variations in school size are great, e.g. the ten smallest ones had fewer than ten pupils and the seven biggest more than 650 in 1998 (Education in Finland 1999, 25-26.)

In the 1980s, the number of schools which were closed varied from 15 to 37 per year throughout the whole country (Figure 2). In the 1990s, the total number of schools which were closed was 671, most of them in the northern and eastern parts of Finland. In 1990 20 schools were closed but the number increased and the peak was reached in 1993 when 133 schools were closed. The next peak was in 1998 when 101 schools were closed (Education in Finland 1999, 26.)

2 THE PRESENT EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN FINLAND

In the Finnish educational system, decisions on the principles of educational policy are made by the Government. The Ministry of Education is the highest authority in educational administration. The National Board of Education is an expert office subordinate to the Ministry of Education. It is responsible for developing educational objectives, contents, methods as well as the organisation of primary and secondary general education, vocational education, and adult education. It issues national curricular guidelines for these levels of education. The National Board of Education also contributes to the evaluation of the Finnish educational system.

For the purposes of regional administration, Finland is divided into six provinces (until 1997 12 provinces). Each province has a Provincial State Office acting as the regional authority. In 1994, regional planning and development were devolved to the regions themselves and became thus closer to local democracy. At the present time, regional regulation is dismantled also in educational administration.

Self-governing municipalities are responsible for local administration. They have the right to levy taxes. Finnish local administration typically comprises many very small municipalities. In 1997, there were 452 municipalities in Finland, 76 per cent of which had less than 10 000 inhabitants and 1.3 per cent more than 100 000 (Statistical Yearbook of Finland 1998, 98). The Government has tried to persuade municipalities to unite to make bigger units.

Comprehensive and upper secondary schools are run by the municipalities. The municipal council appoints a board for educational and cultural administration which manages and supervises municipal schools. The local education system may also include vocational institutions, evening schools and adult education centres. Comprehensive schools might have a board of governors of their own, two or more schools may share a board, or they may not have one at all.

3 THE NEW ADMINISTRATIVE CULTURE IN THE FINNISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

There are several causes which have lead to a thorough change in the administrative culture in the Finnish educational system in the 1990s. Recent developments have largely focussed on administration. The financing system was also changed in 1993 as a part of an overall reform of state grants. The primary goal has been to decentralise administration in matters relating to educational content and teaching arrangements. All of these changes reflect changes in Finnish society and the world as a whole. The main characteristics are the demands for greater independence of municipalities and teachers, but also the

demand for taking better account of the individual needs and wishes of pupils and their parents.

3.1 Changes in Legislation

The first change concerns the relationship between municipalities and the state. The central administration´s control over the municipalities has been diminished considerably in the last few years. The reform of the municipal law in 1995 was preceded by the Free Municipality Experiment starting in 1988. That experiment gave municipalities the impetus to take more responsibility and freedom to carry out activities and plans based on their own needs, wishes, and decisions. Experiences from the experiment were used by a national committee drawing up the new municipal law. More decision making power was transferred from the provincial and national levels of administration to the local level of administration.

The change in the relationship between municipalities and the state was based also on changes in legislation of different sectors of municipal activities such as education, social services and health care. Earlier many decisions made by local authorities had to be confirmed by provincial or national authorities. Now this kind of control by state authorities has been reduced.

Similar changes also occurred in educational administration. In educational legislation the number of regulations controlling the organization of education in the municipalities was gradually reduced, and thus the decision making power concerning education was delegated to municipalities and individual schools. This trend is confirmed by the new educational legislation which came into force at the beginning of 1999.

3.2 Reform of the State Grant System

One of the most important changes occurred in the state grant system. A totally new state grant system was drawn up for education. The new system of state grants, which came into force in 1993, provided municipalities with greater freedom than earlier to organize the education program which they are responsible for. Both the new and the old systems are based on the principle that primary and secondary education are jointly financed by the Government and local authorities.

In the old state grant system, the providers of education received state grants to compensate for the expenses incurred. The amount of state aid was graded according to the financial capacity of the students´ home municipality. This system encouraged providers to increase educational expenditure. It resulted in inefficient use of funds, and subordinated the local authorities to a strict state control.

Under the new system state grants are based on calculated unit costs confirmed for the following year. In primary and secondary education, the unit cost is calculated per student. In comprehensive and upper secondary schools,

state grants now amount to 57 % of costs. The home municipalities provide for the rest of the financing.

The municipal authorities now have the freedom to use the money for organizing the education they are responsible for. In many municipalities the local educational authorities have now delegated the school budget to each school. Thus, the head teacher or the principal of the school is not only accountable for the educational outcomes of his or her school but also for the finance of running the school.

3.3 Reform of Curriculum System

The whole system of drawing up the school curriculum has gradually changed since the 1970s.

The law concerning the principles of the comprehensive school system in Finland was passed in 1968 and came into force in August 1970 (Koulujärjestelmälaki 1968). This reform was preceded by a long debate about the basic principles of education. At the same time, two reports of the curriculum committee that had worked over three years were published.

The first Report (Peruskoulun opetussuunnitelmakomitean mietintö 1970 I, 264 pages) consisted of general curriculum guidelines; the other (Peruskoulun opetussuunnitelmakomitean mietintö II 1970, 436 pages) of subject content. Although these two reports had no official status because they had not been discussed in Parliament, they significantly influenced curriculum development.

The Principles of Comprehensive Schools Act defined those subjects which were to be included in the comprehensive school curriculum. According to this decree, each comprehensive school in each municipality had to have its curriculum accepted by the school board and approved by Provincial Government. This legislation also gave the National Board of Schools power to give general orders and to approve subject content in comprehensive schools. In 1972 the National Board of Schools drew up the format of the comprehensive school curriculum should take and ordered that curriculum content should consist of Report II.

The school boards in municipalities only filled in the four page form agreeing to some parts of Report I and Report II and, so in fact those two reports with that form were accepted as the curriculum of the new comprehensive school in Finland. This was a profound change because until then in every primary school its board of governors had, at least in principle, been able to decide on its curriculum (Lahdes 1977).

This reform meant that Finland now had a unified system for all pupils in the age group 7 to 16. The new system was adopted and the comprehensive school curriculum was introduced in "waves" over six years beginning, for political reasons, from the north of the country in 1972 and ending to the south in 1977.

An intensive in-service-training program for teachers was organised in accordance with the orders of the National Board of Schools and executed by Provincial Governments under the strict supervision of the National Board of Schools.

When implemented, it soon became obvious that the requirements of the new curriculum were unrealistic; it was too extensive and too fragmentary. Teachers were unable to make decisions about their teaching programmes from the enormous volume of material. The consequence was that teachers resorted to using text books. Unfortunately, the textbooks were too extensive, too (Malinen 1974) because they had to be approved by the National Board of Schools to comply with Report II.

Under the Development of Post Comprehensive Education Act (Keskiasteen kehittämislaki 1978), the Government gave curriculum development orders in 1979. Also in the comprehensive school curriculum, the core content was to be defined in the mother tongue (Finnish or Swedish), Mathematics and foreign language (mostly English). The preparation for the reform of educational legislation led to the most extensive codification and renewal of legislation in the history of Finnish education (Lehtisalo & Raivola 1992) The new Comprehensive School Act was passed in 1983 and came into force 1985.

In 1985, the National Board of Schools defined the national core curriculum and curricular guidelines which consisted of subject syllabi and criteria for pupil assessment (Peruskoulun opetussuunnitelman perusteet 1985, one volume of 289 pages). Local authorities drew up the actual comprehensive school curriculum according to the limits defined in curricular guidelines. Municipalities were given a fairly wide latitude in curriculum design to encourage them to plan locally relevant curricula.

But again when implemented, the new comprehensive school curriculum appeared to be too fragmentary and too detailed. At the same time due to several changes in the relationship between municipalities and the state, amendments were made to the Comprehensive School Act delegating decision making power to the local level.

The National Board of Education took a new kind of approach towards the new core curriculum and curricular guidelines. Certain schools all over the country were chosen as "aquarium schools" which were a kind of experimental school whose teachers worked on the drafts for the core curriculum written by civil servants at the National Board of Education. Before the final version was completed anyone could give his or her opinion and statement about the final draft to the National Board of Education.

The Government decided on the distribution of teaching time between subjects in September 1993. The new core curriculum (Peruskoulun opetussuunnitelman perusteet 1994, one volume of 111 pages) was sent to schools in January 1994. The National Board of Education arranged a three days in-service training course for teachers in several places all over the country during spring 1994. Unlike teachers' in-service-training connected with earlier changes of curricula, the National Board of Education took total responsibility for the training.

Schools were able to implement the new curriculum after August 1st once they had drafted it, and it had been approved by the school board. Previously the curriculum was municipal but now every school could draw up its own curriculum. Subsequently, the municipal curriculum contained only those orders

which concerned every school in the municipality e.g. orders connected with the foreign language programme and special education.

The target of this curriculum reform is to allow a much wider choice for pupils, their parents, schools, and municipalities. Therefore, the core curriculum and curricular orders allow greater freedom for schools and teachers who were encouraged to start drawing up the curriculum. One of the problems was how to get parents involved in the work because neither teachers nor parents were used to this kind of co-operation.

3.4 Abolition of the Inspection System

The inspection system of primary schools was started in the 1880s continuing up to the 1970s. In 1970, the education department was established in each provincial government (then 12 in all) and the primary school inspectors were transferred to the new departments, as was the responsibility for inspection of upper secondary schools from the National Board of Schools. The new education departments were responsible for inspection not only of the comprehensive schools and upper secondary schools, but also for civic and workers´ institutes and folk high schools. Inspection reports were collated by the National Board of Schools. Later the National Board of Schools suggested certain areas inspections should focus on. The whole inspection system was ended when the National Board of Schools was united with the National Board of Vocational Education as the National Board of Education in 1991. Since then, the Finnish education system has had no inspection by the state authorities.

3.5 Evaluation of Education

Although the state inspectorate was abolished in 1991, the educational authorities are still interested in how the money the municipalities receive as state grants is being used and if the targets set out in legislation are being met. Therefore, new evaluation systems are needed. The new legislation for education gives the National Board of Education the responsibility to evaluate the whole educational system in Finland. Municipalities and schools themselves are responsible for assessing the effectiveness of the education they arrange. More and more attention is nowadays given to developing the quality of education and teaching in schools.

There are not now and have never been any forms of national tests of educational outcome in the comprehensive school in Finland. The only national test is the matriculation exam at the end of the upper secondary school. The organizations of teachers of different subjects have prepared some tests, but they have not been national, and it has been up to the teacher to decide if he or she would use them. Now the schools are responsible in participating the national tests which usually are organized by the National Board of Schools on sample basis.

4 THE FUTURE

The regulation that stipulated the minimum size of the lower stage comprehensive school was abolished in 1995. The municipality now decides whether a school should continue or should be closed down or united with another school. It is also possible now that one head teacher or principal acts as a head of more than one school or several small schools and is responsible and accountable for them. Some municipalities seem to have used this system in order to save money.

In December 1995, the Government made a 5-year-plan on the development of the Finnish educational system until the year 2000. One of the ideas in the decision concerns structural change of the comprehensive school by integrating the lower and the upper stages. This was confirmed by the new legislation. The more flexible school legislation and the increase in the scope of local authority power will facilitate this change.

Another idea suggested in the long term plan is the abandonment of age group grades. This proposal means gradeless studies where the contents are arranged in the form of courses. The pupils may proceed according to their own abilities and interests. Improving international co-operation and education for international understanding as well as widening the scope of foreign language learning are also suggestions in that long term plan.

The profound reform of legislation concerning the whole educational system from pre-primary education to universities which came into force at the beginning of 1999 gives municipalities and schools even more flexibility.

Most of the changes has been introduced and applied gradually in municipalities and schools during the 1990s. There are big differences between them in the manner and pace they have taken up the challenges in adopting the new ideas and procedures. The attitude of teachers and head teachers/principals towards the changes also varies. The reader of this report will be able to perceive some of those differences when reading other articles in this report.

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CURRICULUM CHANGES AND SCHOOL CULTURE IN A SMALL RURAL SCHOOL: WHICH WAY FORWARD?

A Case Study of Curriculum Change in the Lahdelma Lower-level Comprehensive School

Eija Kimonen and Raimo Nevalainen

1 INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 The Purpose and Aims of the Study

The purpose of this case-study analysis is to describe curriculum change and its effect on school culture as seen in a small rural school in Finland. The aims are to observe the effects of curriculum change on the planning, implementation and evaluation of school work and teaching. A small rural school was chosen as the subject of the case study. In the following, we will outline the processes of curriculum change in the Lahdelma Lower-level Comprehensive School. To preserve anonymity, pseudonyms will be used throughout this article.

1.2 Small Rural Schools in Finland

1.2.1 Quantitative Development

Small schools have traditionally existed in the sparsely-populated Finnish countryside. In the beginning of the 1990s approximately 60 per cent (= 2239) of Finnish lower-level schools (3729 in all) were small schools with 1–3 teacher posts. In the school year 1992–1993 there were 50 one-teacher lower-level schools (1.3

per cent), 1352 (36.3 per cent) two-teacher schools and 837 (22.4 per cent) three-teacher schools. (Tilastotietoja peruskouluasteen kouluista 1994, 8.) (Table 1.) The number of small schools has, however, varied according to social, cultural and economic conditions. The quantitative development of schools has been connected to both social and educational policy, which regulates the number of schools. (Laukkanen, Muhonen, Ruuhijärvi, Similä & Toivonen 1986, 19, 28.) Since the 1960s the network of schools has clearly been growing sparser (Kivinen 1988, 265). Altogether 241 lower-level schools were closed during the 1980s (Koulutus. Education in Finland 1991, 33). The rate of school closure increased still further between 1990 to 1997, when a total of 570 lower-level comprehensive schools were closed down. The most significant reason for the closure of schools has been the dramatic decrease in the number of pupils. During recent years economic factors have also become significant in the decision to close schools. (Koulutus Suomessa 1998, 14–15; Oppilaitostilastot 1998, 12–13; Tilastotietoja peruskouluasteen kouluista 1994, 3–4.)

TABLE 1 Small rural schools in Finland for children under the age of 12 years in the school year 1994

Teacher posts in school	f	%	Pupils in school (7–12 years)
1	50	1.3	< 14
2	1352	36.3	≥ 14
3	837	22.4	≥ 36
≥ 4	1490	40.0	≥ 78
Total	3729	100.0	

The rapid decrease in the number of small rural schools is also a typical feature in other industrialized countries (see e.g. Leight & Rinehart 1992, 138, 142). The modernization of society, and a vigorous migration from the countryside have led to an increase in pupil numbers in the urban lower-level comprehensive schools. (See Bell & Sigsworth 1987; Marshall 1985, 10–16; Nevalainen 1995, 83.) In 1997, the average number of pupils in lower-level comprehensive schools in Finland was 111. In the beginning of the 1990s the average size of a lower-level school was less than 100 pupils. At that time the average number of pupils in rural schools was 62 and in urban schools 211. In 1997 over one half (56 %) of comprehensive school pupils went to school in towns; approximately a fifth (19 %) in densely populated rural areas, and over a fourth (26%) in the more outlying rural areas. (Koulutus Suomessa 1998, 15, 18.)

1.2.2 Qualitative Development

The qualitative development of a small rural school can be studied from the point of view of the school's context, resources, processes and products. In Finland, attempts have been made to solve the contextual problems of small rural schools, for example, by enriching the life of the surrounding villages and developing their activities. An important developmental goal in the countryside is to strengthen the interaction between the school and the surrounding community. The cultural, material and economic resources of small schools have been developed by training teachers, repairing school buildings, writing teaching materials which offer differentiation in combined grades, increasing the financial support for school transport, and enhancing resources by applying the time-resource quota system in each individual school. Attempts have been made to solve the process-based problems related to teaching, by developing pupils' independent working skills, applying the period system in teaching, and by implementing outdoor education. Furthermore, the curricula of combined grades have been developed, for example, by unifying the teaching of different grades and by emphasizing the use of local subject material in teaching. An important part has been played by increased cooperation between the school and the home, and through collaboration between small schools. (Kalaoja 1990a, 93–110; 1990b, 1–3, 91–102.)

1.2.3 School Culture

The main focus of this study is the connection which exists between curriculum change, and changes in school culture. School culture has two dimensions, the dimensions of content and form. The content of a school culture consists of the individual attitudes, values, beliefs, habits, assumptions and ways of doing things, which are common to a certain group of teachers or a wider community. The form of a school culture means the patterns of relationship which exist among the staff, and the sense of community of the teachers and also of the auxiliary staff. The form explains the features of the social network built up by the school staff; for example, its tendency to isolation or cooperation. (Sahlberg 1997, 129; see also Hargreaves 1994, 165–166.)

It is rather difficult to implement changes in school culture. It requires changes to, or, in some cases, the reinforcement of, beliefs, values, expectations, habits, roles and the existing power structures. In order to change, the school must be active, dynamic and autonomous. In school development it may be assumed that reforms to the curricula, or the introduction of new equipment will change the teachers' way of teaching. In spite of all the in-service training programs and development projects, a school culture can remain unchanged for decades. Opposition to reforms may result from a conflict between the teacher's own beliefs and the new ideas. (Sahlberg 1997, 180–181, 184.)

According to previous studies, the school culture of small rural schools has been characterized by family-like atmosphere, informal relationships between the staff and the pupils as well as an absense of rituals (Vulliamy, Kimonen, Nevalainen & Webb 1997, 111; Webb & Vulliamy with Häkkinen, Hämäläinen,

Kimonen, Nevalainen & Nikki 1997, 114; see also Bell & Sigsworth 1987; Galton & Patrick 1990; Kimonen & Nevalainen 1995; Vulliamy & Webb 1995). Such schools also often have close relations with the village community. There are general contextual problems in small schools that might slow down a change in school culture; for example, their geographic isolation, the decrease in pupil numbers and the threat of the school closing down. (Kalaoja 1990a, 38–43, 74; Nevalainen 1995, 88, 91.)

The success of any curriculum change in small schools is very closely connected to the self-identity of the teacher (Vulliamy et al. 1997, 97–115; Webb et al. 1997, 102, 114). The culture of small schools enables teachers to preserve their prior value systems more easily than is the case with their colleagues in larger schools (Vulliamy et al. 1997, 113). The ability to reflect the matters related to the teacher's work is crucial for the survival and development of a small school. The teachers have to be aware of the factors related to the school's functioning. In order to reform the curriculum, they have to be able to analyze the teaching they do critically. The teachers have to know the role of the school as well as their own role in the village community. Autonomous self-reflection is especially important in small-school work, because the work, by its very nature offers few contacts with adults. (Kimonen & Nevalainen 1993, 105; Nevalainen 1995, 292.)

1.3 Data Collection Techniques

In Lahdelma School, data was collected during two day-visits to the school in the spring of 1995, and several visits to the village community in the summer of 1997. Data collection involved tape-recorded interviews, observations, photos and document analysis. Interviews were carried out with both the class teachers and three pupils. (See e.g. Syrjälä 1994; Syrjälä & Numminen 1988; Webb 1994.)

The selection of the subject of this case study was motivated by a need to describe in detail the way curriculum change takes place in a small Finnish rural school. The case-study school is located rather near to the university (45 km), so the school visits were easy to arrange. Both the class teachers in the school were qualified, but they had received different basic training. The teachers were also eager to participate in the case study, and they were working on the new curriculum at that time.

2 THE CONTEXT OF THE CASE-STUDY SCHOOL

2.1 The School in the Village Community

Lahdelma Lower-level Comprehensive School is located in a Central Finnish municipality with 5000 inhabitants. Some fifty per cent of the population are employed in service industries. Approximately a third is in farming and forestry, and a sixth in industry. There are ten lower-level schools in the municipality, eight of which employ two teachers. Two of the small schools are under threat of

closure due to a decrease in the number of pupils. An upper-level comprehensive school, an upper secondary school, and a special school are also to be found in the municipality.

Lahdelma School is located in a remote village with 200 inhabitants. The majority of the village people earn their livelihood in farming and forestry. In addition to the school there is a small grocery store with postal services in the village. The village is serviced by a municipal mobile library. As the school is an important building in the village it is, together with the comprehensive school, the venue for many village activities. Due to the decrease in pupil numbers, the school is facing closure. This has contributed to the cooperation of the villagers in order to keep the school in the community.

2.2 The Resources of a Small School

2.2.1 Physical and Material Resources

Lahdelma School has been in operation for the past hundred years. The school building was completed in 1897. During the renovation work in 1990, the teaching facilities were refurbished. There are two classrooms in the building, as well as a kitchen and a dining room used for teaching, a staff room and restrooms. As there is no purpose-built hall for indoor sports, one of the classrooms is utilized for this. Handicraft lessons are given in another building across the school yard. There is a sports ground and several storage buildings in the school yard. The villagers have donated some teaching equipment to the school.

> Some of our equipment has been donated to us. The VCR belongs to the village club, which bought it for us. The better of these computers is shared by us and the Farmers' Association. (Juha, male teacher.)

2.2.2 Human Resources

There are two teachers in the school, one of them acting as the headteacher. The school is visited by a peripatetic special teacher. In addition to the teaching staff the school employs a cleaner-caretaker. A district health nurse has regular surgery hours at the school. The school board consists of five members and a teacher representative. During the spring of 1995 there were 17 pupils, of whom three were in preschool teaching, four in grades 1–2 and ten in grades 3–6.

The head teacher, Juha, has graduated from a modern teacher training program lasting approximately five years, leading to the degree of Master of Education. Since graduation he has been working as a teacher for seven years. The other teacher, Ulla, has graduated from a four-year teacher training college. She has held a teaching post for 25 years.

3 CURRICULUM PLANNING PROCESS AND OUTCOMES

3.1 Management of Change, Trends and Issues in Curriculum Policy

The diminishing financial resources of small rural schools has affected the physical and mental resources available to them. However, the teaching facilities in Lahdelma School are now up to modern standards due to the renovation in 1990. On the other hand, there has been no funding for new equipment recently. Because pupil numbers have decreased, the post of school cook has been abolished.

> During that time we have had some considerable improvements here. The renovation took place in 1990... We got more room for small-group teaching... Now we have got three proper rooms for teaching. Financially, there has been a slump during the last three years... We'll have to get by with less money. There have been years when we have had no money for equipment... There has been a slight drop in pupil numbers. Bigger classes have graduated and there are fewer younger pupils. When I first came here seven years ago, there were 25 pupils. Now we have got 14 in the school plus the preschoolers. The lady who had worked here all her life as a cook retired. Now we have a contracted caretaker-cleaner instead. The staff has been reduced by 30 per cent. (Juha, male teacher.)

According to Juha, the headteacher, curriculum change has not brought about any remarkable alterations in his teaching methods, as in a small school it has always been rather easy to organize the timetable. Consequently, there have been no great changes in Lahdelma School teaching methods, which largely follow the precepts of traditional pedagogics. The headteacher, however, had certain expectations from the curriculum reform. He felt that the reform would add to the freedom enjoyed in the school, and that this would lead to changes in teaching practice.

> The new curriculum has not really moved the earth. So far we have been able to be flexible and adapt to the circumstances. If the weather is nice, we can, for example, go for a nature trip. We have had our freedom to do things so far... I don't really think that there will be any great changes (in teaching methods) during this time, not yet. Let's say that we have moved closer to searching for information about new teaching methods, than we were seven years ago. I don't see anything brand new in this. Relatively many things have been done in this way, as the curriculum has not changed much during my years here. I really expect there to be some changes in teaching methods when we start using the new curriculum. However, it will give us more freedom to do things differently. (Juha, male teacher.)

Development of the curriculum began in Lahdelma School in January 1994, as the teachers held a discussion with the parents on the underlying values of the school. During our observation period in May 1995, the teachers were in the process of writing the first draft of the proposed new curriculum. The school board approved the curriculum in late May.

> A year ago we had discussions with the parents about the underlying values and that was the start, really... We have now got the first draft ready for proofreading. I imagine that is

what the other schools have been doing as well, they are at about the same stage. (Juha, male teacher.)

3.2 Nature of Curriculum Management and Planning

The Lahdelma School curriculum has been planned cooperatively by the teachers. The basis for the planning was the national Framework Curriculum for the Comprehensive School (1994). The teachers have been provided for more ideas for this project; for example, from in-service training meetings, teachers of other schools, parents, pupils, and professional journals.

> It may well be said that in any case the responsibility lies on the shoulders of the headteacher. We have cooperated on it, though, all the time... We have had people with more experience in curriculum work talking about it in the municipal in-service training sessions. Of course, we have the national booklet, the Framework Curriculum for the Comperehensive School, and reports of this process provided by other schools... We have had some discussion about what we have experienced. And then reading the professional journals, what has been done elsewhere... The parents have come up with some new ideas for it as well. (Juha, male teacher.)

> We sit there and think and plan. One comes up with this idea and the other with that... Of course the curriculum is flexible in the process, it depends on the teachers. We have made it conform to our views. And in the way we plan to do it... We are teaching each other's groups. We plan to go about the theme when we plan to do it, and decide who will teach it. We plan together what we will be teaching. We have had these theme weeks and so on. These weeks have been held for all levels of the school, not just the upper classes. We plan them all together... We have succeeded in cooperating really well. (Ulla, female teacher.)

During the municipal in-service training meetings, the teachers from lower and upper-level schools have participated in cooperative planning work to suggest guidelines for the municipal curriculum work. The teachers of different level municipal schools who had participated in the national in-service training have acted as instructors in the training sessions.

> We have met with all the teachers in the municipality for in-service training. There we met the upper-level teachers, who made suggestions about what the pupils entering the upper-level school should know. We have been working on these kinds of municipal guidelines for the curricula. I think some of the schools will concentrate on those things the teachers of the schools are good at. For example, I will go for more sports, well, I will try to give it a little more lesson time. And, of course, we have talked with the parents and kids about giving more time for international awareness in our school. I imagine there will be more use of the surroundings in teaching, the immediate surroundings of the school and starting studying from our own regional features. (Juha, male teacher.)

The teachers of the school have utilized their own special skills in connection with the planning of the contents and points of focus of the curricular subjects. Since, for example, the head teacher, Juha, has specialized in teaching Biology, Physical Education and Music, he is also in charge of the planning and teaching of these subjects in this school.

> We have sketched this manually on a large piece of paper. We have listed our ideas about the things we have done... We have thought about contents and lesson hour-distribution by year groups; how this should be arranged in our school... For example, I started thinking about the area of Environmental Studies by myself, and then brought it up in a discussion with my colleague, and we debated whether things would be better done this way or that, what would be the most suitable for this year group or that and how we should go about these things... So far we have done this with the year groups, we have both had our own groups to teach. However, they are of different ages so... I have been in charge of teaching Music and Sports. (Juha, male teacher.)

The teachers have discussed the curricular points of focus with the pupils and the parents. International awareness has become very significant in these discussions.

> We have discussed these things with the pupils in the same way. They have thought about foreign languages, which they feel are the most important and which they would like to study, if they were given a chance to do that. In the same way they have listed the things in the new curriculum that they feel are the most interesting... We had two parents' meetings on these curricular matters. We talked about the strengths and, then again, the weaknesses of our school... We talked about the unique characteristics of our village and our region that we could include in the curriculum. Then we talked about our areas of emphasis and put them in order of importance, which of them the parents thought were the most important... We were surprised by the popularity of the topic of international education in these discussions with both groups in a rural village like this in Central Finland... Languages were considered important in the future. (Juha, male teacher.)

The teachers of Lahdelma School have visited other small schools in the region. They have, for example, spoken of their excursions abroad. With this kind of teacher exchange, the special skills of Lahdelma School teachers could be utilized in neighbouring schools. Simultaneously, the teachers of a neighbouring school have been teaching in Lahdelma School.

> We have had some teacher exchange going on sometimes. We have visited other schools, telling them about our own innovations, ideas or themes. There could be more of that... For example, I have visited some Asian countries, so I have spoken about those countries in the neighbouring schools. And there has been a visit by one of the teachers to our school, telling us about something else. (Juha, male teacher.)

3.3 Perspectives on Teacher Professional Development

In-service training has motivated the curriculum work carried out by the teachers in Lahdelma School. They have been able to sketch new models of thinking for their own work. The experience of exchange with other teachers has been very important to the teachers as well. The head teacher, however, felt that the weaknesses of in-service training were the cost of the sessions as well as the irrelevance of the contents to the work of the teachers in small rural schools.

> Of course, these training sessions give some kick to the writing of one's own curriculum. There is more enthusiasm to work on my own curriculum after a training day. It is probably motivating us, too... This training is always good in the sense that even if you

> hear some things you knew already, you tend to think about those things more thoroughly during these training courses. Shall we say that there are probably no sudden changes but it will seep through over a longer period... It has been of some help. Especially when you hear how these things are going on elsewhere and some experiences... It is probably motivating as such. Even if it breaks up the routine... I reckon there are no mind-blowing new ideas to be found in those courses. I think that getting people to think is their most important function. During those courses you have more time to think deeply about your own work than you have during the normal school day. Meeting colleagues and discussing our experiences are significant as well... These training sessions cost a lot of money, and there is not much to go round. And then some in-service training sessions are not very well planned. They haven't quite hit the target. At least in some of the meetings I have been to, there are representatives of bigger schools, usually. The situation in those schools is rather different from ours in a small school. (Juha, male teacher.)

> For the first time I was in a meeting together thinking about these things. It was one of the fruitful days. You get to share your experiences with people... We have talked a lot out there together. Now it is really easy to ask for opinions and how you would do this and how you go about that... Then we teachers of grades 1 and 2 have evening meetings together in this municipality. We bring along our ideas and models for handicraft and talk about them... Three or four times a year... Those meetings are very fruitful. Then of course we talk about other school-related things. (Ulla, female teacher.)

Both the school's teachers have participated in in-service training in preschool teaching. The head teacher, Juha, has also taken part in a language teaching seminar. He would especially like to participate in in-service training in computer-assisted teaching, as the school was about to take part in an experiment of telematic teaching. He also wanted some English language training. Additionally, he was interested in in-service training in developing non-graded lower-level school. The other teacher, Ulla, would especially like to participate in in-service training in Arts and Handicraft in order to get new ideas for her work.

> I would really need training in computers. The use of those is going to get more important over the next few years, and we have this experiment on telematic teaching about to start at our school. A foreign language, we'll do English first, will be taught from one location with the help of computer terminals and a conference telephone system.... Now, as I have been given English classes, I need more practice in my own language skills. I could certainly use some training... At one time I thought about this non-graded lower-level school. It would be really interesting to develop it in such a small school as ours. (Juha, male teacher.)

> If only I could get to Heinola (the in-service training centre). They have all these wonderful courses on Arts and Handicrafts. I reckon I've been teaching for such a long time that I am about to run out of ideas or imagination. New materials have been brought out, things I could use, if only I knew more about them. Those courses are really difficult to get onto. They are so expensive. I've read about them. I have been itching to go. (Ulla, female teacher.)

3.4 Factors Promoting and Constraining Curriculum Change

The curriculum work at Lahdelma School has been impeded by the teachers' knowing about the threat of closure. The financial difficulties of the government and the municipality has constrained work on the curriculum, as there has been

no compensation for the teachers' increased responsibilities. The national guidelines for the teaching allocation for different subjects have obviously restricted the curriculum work. Additionally, Lahdelma School's physical resources have limited the possibilities for the planning and implementing of Physical Education. According to the head teacher, his personal circumstances have drained his strength, consequently affecting the curriculum work.

> The fear that the school will be closed down is affecting the curriculum work. It has slowed us down, a lot, because at one time we didn't know if there was going to be a school next year... Even if you work hard and you can see the results, the work itself doesn't matter if there are no pupils. This has been an enormous work load, with no compensation. Especially now, when times are tough and there's no money to spare for this process. In that sense it has been the worst time to do something new. There is no motivation for this. It has to come from the inside, the demand to bring up something new... The teaching allocation given dictates our activities to a great extent. We cannot do everything we would like to because we have to take the minimum time allocation quota into account for some subjects... In small schools these physical environments restrict the teaching of sports to some extent. We will have to adjust to the situation. I cannot do all I would like to do, especially with respect to the indoor facilities... The financial resources are not sufficient... And this year I haven't had very much time to delve into these things, for personal reasons. I haven't had the strength. (Juha, male teacher.)

> Last year, when we had to start with this, we were so desperate out here. We both thought that it was in vain, we didn't know if we would be here next year. It was so difficult to get this thing started. We had absolutely no interest in it. (Ulla, female teacher.)

According to the head teacher of Lahdelma School, the local curriculum was a rather distant consideration for many teachers. The work on the school curriculum has forced the teachers to think more deeply about the basics of the school's functioning. The flexible working practices in Lahdelma School have been of benefit in this work. The surrounding countryside and its pure and beautiful nature with varied ecotypes have provided a good starting-point for the teaching of Environmental and Nature Studies.

> This should not be curriculum planning for the sake of curriculum planning. The fact that this has been marketed as a huge reform and a changeover to something new has been a good policy to some extent, but it is not solely that. It is a good thing that you have to think about things, about why we are here and why we do this or that. The local curriculum has definitely been a rather remote consideration for several of us... We certainly get more deeply involved when we do it ourselves. You can do things more flexibly with a small school. If you want to make an excursion, you can easily take the whole school with you. We don't need many vehicles to get this lot moving... We have got better opportunities to teach, for example, things about the environment in practice than in many urban schools... As we have got such good surroundings for teaching here it will certainly have some influence on our curriculum work and it already has. (Juha, male teacher.)

3.5 The Basic Features of the Curriculum Contents

3.5.1 The School Curriculum

The function of the school curriculum is to provide a basis for the planning and implementation of education and teaching. The curriculum of Lahdelma School (1995) claims that the curriculum is not a solid and stabile entity, but something that can be modified on the grounds of experiences gained, self-evaluation, and the learning results achieved. The planning is based on the national and local frameworks for curricula.

According to Lahdelma School curriculum (1995), the functioning principle of the school is to support the individual pupil in growing up and making progress, so that the pupil will become a self-confident, internationally-oriented and well-behaved Finn; and to provide pupils with the basic skills and knowledge which will enable them to observe and understand the world around them. Education and teaching have the following major goals:

1. The pupil as an individual: becoming self-confident, responsible for his/her work, coping with disappointments, expressing one's feelings and thoughts.
2. The pupil in the community: cooperation skills, good manners, complying with rules agreed on together with others, tolerance for difference.
3. The pupil in the school: gaining the minimum knowledge and skills required for transition to the upper-level school, the study skills needed in school, practising the skills of information search, and of processing and applying information; developing problem-solving skills, initiative, creativity.

The head teacher, Juha, and the other teacher, Ulla, described their own aims and principles of education as follows:

> I try to educate my pupils to be people who are eager to know more and capable of appreciating how nice it is to learn new things... If I could make the pupils see that there is pleasure in such things. All these basic values are important, being open and honest in dealings with other people, and getting along with different people... At the lower level skills in Finnish are the most important; communication skills and developing them. Then of course, Mathematics, too, and that has gained a bit more weight in the new national curriculum as well. All these basic skills are important. (Juha, male teacher.)

> One thing that I am trying to get through to the kids is that they should become honest and hardworking people... One other thing that in my opinion is important, is respect for older people... Everyone will learn according to their own resources and at their own pace, not everybody has to be the best... If only they grow up to be good citizens. That is the main issue here. (Ulla, female teacher.)

In addition to the functioning principle of the school and the aims of education, the Lahdelma School curriculum (1995) describes the lesson-hour distribution among the subjects taught, the areas of focus of teaching, the arrangements for special teaching, and the implementation of the evaluation of the pupils and the school's achievements. The curriculum concludes with the aims

and contents of the subjects. After the discussions with parents on the values of the school, the most important theme units were identified: international awareness, traffic, consumer, and health education. For example, the curriculum shows its emphasis on international matters by additions to the lesson time allocated for the teaching of English. The school also tries to arrange teaching in elementary-level French for grades 5 and 6 in connection with the telematic experiment.

According to the school curriculum (1995), parts of Environmental and Nature Studies will be taught in 'themes', so that the pupil will study the same theme twice in lower-level school. During the second period, topics are expanded so as to include, for example, a historical angle. Other subjects can be integrated into the themes when possible. The themes for Environmental and Nature Studies for grades 1–3 and 4–6 are listed in Figure 1.

> Grades 1–2 are one unit, 3–4 another, and 5–6 the last. During those years there are certain themes that are dealt with during the time... Certainly some subject-specific things will survive. So far we have been working on this so that we have had some subject-based learning and then some theme-based. We have several theme-unit weeks in the year, and then some subject-based work as well. (Juha, male teacher.)

Environmental and Nature Studies: themes for grades 1–3	**Environmental and Nature Studies: themes for grades 4–6**
First course - operating as a pedestrian - flora and fauna in your back garden - regional geography and occupations - seasons in nature - Finland and the Nordic countries	**First course** - being a cyclist in traffic - the structure of the flora and fauna of your back garden - animal typology - species identification - the impact of the seasons on nature - Finnish and Nordic geography - regional geography and history
Second course - the globe and human living conditions - environmental protection - water - Europe and Africa - I, a human being - pets - the forests and us	**Second course** - the globe and the living conditions for man - environmental protection - hydrobiology - European and African geography and history - human biology - pets - forest biology and its benefits to people
Third course - the globe, the continents - prehistoric animals - Australia and Asia - population - domestic animals and farming - gardens	**Third course** - the globe, the continents - structure of population - Australian and Asian geography and history - biology in the garden

FIGURE 1 Themes for Environmental and Nature Studies

3.5.2 The Working Plan

The teachers of Lahdelma School have drawn up a working plan for a school year (1995–1996) according to the curriculum. The working plan describes the functioning principle of the school and aims parallel to the ones mentioned in the curriculum. The working plan includes the schedule for pupils and teachers. Figure 2 depicts the schedule for grades 1–2 in Lahdelma School. The other teacher, Ulla, teaches mainly these grades.

Lesson	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1	Religion	Music	Music	Religion	Environ-mental Studies
2	Finnish	Finnish	Finnish	Maths	Finnish
	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
3	Environ-mental Studies	Art	Finnish	Handicraft	Maths
4	Environ-mental Studies	Finnish	Handicraft	Physical Education	Finnish
5	Maths				

FIGURE 2 Schedule for grades 1–2 in Lahdelma School

The head teacher, Juha, teaches mainly grades 3–6. Figure 3 shows the schedule for these grades in Lahdelma School. Juha is in charge of teaching Sports and Music in the school. Ulla teaches Mathematics.

> Juha does Sports and Music with all the kids. He has more to give in those. I don't have the energy to run around with the kids as I used to. He has more talent for music than I. I am doing Maths in return. (Ulla, female teacher.)

Lesson	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1	Finnish*/ Finnish**	Music/ Religion	English/ Finnish	- / English	Environ-mental Studies/ Environ-mental Studies
2	Religion/ English	Finnish/ Maths	Finnish/ Maths	Finnish/ Art	Finnish/ Finnish
	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
3	Environ-mental Studies/ Environ-mental Studies	Art/ Music	Physical Education/ Physical Education	English/ Maths	Maths/ Maths
4	Environ-mental Studies/ Environ-mental Studies	Maths/ Finnish	Physical Education/ Physical Education	Maths/ Finnish	Art/ Art
5	History/ History	Physical Education/ Physical Education	Maths/ English	Handicraft/ Handicraft	Telematic lessons
6				Handicraft/ Handicraft	

Grades 3–4* Grades 5–6 **

FIGURE 3 Schedule for grades 3–6 in Lahdelma School

According to the Lahdelma School working plan (1995–1996), the monthly themes and events in school work are:

August: Theme: traffic and me, garden biology; bike excursion and nature trip
September: Theme: garden biology and agriculture; inter-school track and field competition
October: Theme: population
November: Theme: Asia
December: Christmas celebration and related entertainment
January: Theme: Australia

February:	Inter-school skiing competition in the municipality
March:	Theme: Pupils' presentations; lower-level cultural event together with other schools, school camp in Lapland
April:	Sports camp for grade 5
May:	Theme: spring in nature; nature trail

4 CURRICULUM POLICY INTO PRACTICE

4.1 Groupings, Differentiation and Special Education Needs Provision

According to the school curriculum (1995), the small size of basic teaching groups is one of the educational benefits offered by Lahdelma School. Learning arrangements can be individually made. The teacher will have more time per pupil. Moreover, the groupings are flexible and can be altered to suit different circumstances.

> We could arrange groups so that there would be pupils of different ages giving advice to the younger ones. The older pupils can act as teacher's aides, if needed... For example, this year in handicraft the groups were all mixed... There were some lessons with Ulla, when the preschoolers were there too, in which my pupils were there to help her. Whenever I am able to differentiate teaching then the quick learners can go and help others in some things. (Juha, male teacher.)

One of the problems in a small school is the small number or even lack of pupils of the same age. Accordingly, there may be difficulties in assigning group work suitable for a particular year group, said the head teacher.

> There are sometimes problems with pupils having no classmates to work with on a project. There is one girl on her own in my grade 3. She must be feeling pretty miserable. (Juha, male teacher.)

There are 17 pupils in Lahdelma School. There are two basic teaching groups, comprising four pupils in grades 1–2 and ten in grades 3–6. Additionally, there is a group of three preschool children in the school. (Appendix 1.)

> We cannot really make so many different groups with these kids. Usually, there are two groups in grades 5–6 and possibly two in 3–4, or perhaps just one. There are so few of them. (Juha, male teacher.)

According to the Lahdelma School curriculum (1995), pupils with minor learning difficulties will be supported with remedial instruction. In case of major disability a special-needs teacher will be called in. The need for special education is assessed each autumn. If needed, a special teacher will visit the school. Pupils with speech or writing problems are in part-time special teaching.

> A special-needs pupil has to be taken into account all the time. I use the same material to some extent, but some things have to be adjusted. A special pupil will have some material

> of his own to work on. I'll have to consider what he is able to do in a normal class... We are taking care of teaching, just the two of us. The special teacher only comes here for a couple of lessons a week. The teacher has no part in the planning of teaching. (Juha, male teacher.)

4.2 Teaching the Basic Skills in a Combined Grade

The implementation of a new curriculum necessitates first and foremost a change in the teacher's modes of thinking and action. These changes have to be reflected in the teaching practices of the teacher. (See e.g. Fullan 1987, 214; 1988, 196–197.) The curriculum planning process in Lahdelma School has changed the teachers' ideas about knowledge, education and learning in a more progressive direction. The teaching practices in the school were, however, not much influenced by the change, as the teaching follows the precepts of traditional pedagogics.

> I don't think there is much of anything new to be seen, as we are still in the planning process with this curriculum. Of course you try to vary your teaching as much as possible all the time. In some things there have been more shared responsibilities during this spring. I have tried to introduce some new working methods into the teaching so that the kids would be working on something with a partner and then be teaching each other while they are at it. There has been some more of that. And then information search and selection, but probably nothing special. We are still working within the old framework of teacher-pupil, even though I am not such a distant figure to the pupils any more. They still look up to you as a teacher in a small rural school like this. I get along with the pupils pretty well, they like to tell what they have been doing at home and things that have happened to them, most of the pupils... The pupils respect me and they think of me as the head teacher, the disciplinarian, as well. Sometimes you have to give order, but then again, I don't like that in this job, telling people what to do. I don't like it at all. (Juha, male teacher.)

In the following, we will briefly describe the teaching process in a combined grade at Lahdelma School during our observation period in May 1995. We observed the lesson given by the other teacher, Ulla, in Religion and Mathematics in grades 3–6. This combined class consisted of one pupil from the third grade, three pupils from the fourth grade, four from the fifth grade and two from the sixth grade. The pupils in grades 3–4 studied Religion in the dining hall and the pupils of grades 5–6 Mathematics in their own class room. First the teacher gave instructions for a pair work assignment to the pupils of grades 3–4, and then she returned to the class to teach Mathematics to grades 5–6. The teacher began the Mathematics lesson by explaining the location of integers in a continuum. She illustrated her lesson on the blackboard. After receiving brief instructions, the pupils proceeded to do the exercises in the Mathematics book. The teacher walked around the classroom and gave individual instructions to pupils, and occasionally checked on the grade 3–4 pupils working in the dining hall. The pupils checked their answers individually against the answer key on the teacher's desk. As an extra exercise they were asked to write mathematical problems they had made up themselves on the blackboard for the others. Towards the end of the lesson the teacher gave both groups of pupils their homework and then ended the lesson. The teacher stayed in class for a while to instruct a special-needs pupil who was following a modified curriculum.

4.3 Project Method in a Combined Grade

In the Lahdelma School curriculum (1995) the teachers have listed the theme units for grades 1–6. According to the head teacher, Juha, he used approximately a third of his teaching for project work during the school year 1994–1995. The approximate duration of a project was a week. During the year 1994–1995 there was also one realization of a theme unit week for the whole of the school.

> When we had regional history, then we did it with the whole school, even Grade 1. We made excursions to the local museums. They are arranged so that it will take a day or three days or so. Juha had this one week in English only, he was teaching only in English. He wouldn't speak anything else to me, either. It was rather fascinating. (Ulla, female teacher.)

> In one semester we might have one bigger theme unit for the whole school... For example, the week for handicraft... It was easy to instruct the whole school together... One theme for a unit was Africa... Then we have planned this thing on birds, spring in nature kind of thing. We'll spend the night at the school, and then in the morning we'll go on a bird-watching trip, now in May. Then we had this one day about computers, things that you can do with them... If we have something for the whole school, then we'll plan it together. If we are doing it just for our separate groups, then we'll make the plans alone. There is something like 30 per cent for projects and theme units, and then about 70 per cent of the time for something else. Usually, the projects last for a week. Then we have had some shorter ones, and then just one-day themes. (Juha, male teacher.)

During our observation period at Lahdelma School, at the beginning of a project work, the teacher gave the pupils the chosen topic, and instructions for carrying it out. The pupils collected information on the specific topic (chosen for the week); and at the end of the week they made a presentation of their results to the other pupils in the basic teaching group. The head teacher Juha described the project progress as follows:

> Usually it starts with the topics that I give them. Let's take Africa as an example. I will give them a list of countries and topics to choose from, and they will start studying that country more closely. I might give some instructions, what things they should deal with in their stories, and then they can add anything that they think is interesting. They will choose the topic according to their own interests... Then they will start working on the material, and I will help if needed. If there are problems, for example, if they need some information they cannot find anywhere they will come to me for help. I'll help them, if they have some problems with it... Then we'll go through the projects together and check what everyone has done. They will describe everything they have achieved, things that they have found out about... It might take a week, for example. (Juha, male teacher.)

According to the head teacher, Juha, the pupils have to think about the topics more deeply and more independently in project work assigned to groups than would be possible in traditional teacher-centred teaching. The teacher has to consider very carefully the organization of the activity as well as the structure of the groups so that the groups will function as efficiently as possible.

> The pupils will have to talk about the topic among themselves and share ideas at that level. The point is that the pupils will have to search for information more than usual while they are doing the projects. It might well be that pupils are more eager to find out information

about the things that they consider interesting. Sometimes I feel that it is bad that these things take too long, progress is slower... You don't always get good results in theme unit work. It has to be well prepared so that the group functions efficiently. It's not always like that. (Juha, male teacher.)

There are some gaps in the arrangements, so that everything will run smoothly, so that everybody will be occupied all the time. There will be gaps here and there from time to time... The pupils are impatient, they won't wait to be instructed on the proceedings, and then we'll end up in a mess. Suddenly there is a block and things just don't work out well. (Ulla, female teacher.)

In the following we will briefly describe the different phases of the mini projects that were undertaken at Lahdelma School in a combined grade. We observed the Biology lesson given by the head teacher in grades 3–6. The teacher began by giving the instructions and the worksheets to the pupils of grades 3–4. Working in pairs, the pupils had to complete the assignment; which concerned the structure and vital functions of a fly. The teacher encouraged them to compare their answers with those of other teams. As the pupils of grades 3–4 started on the work, the teacher turned to the pupils of grades 5–6. He started a discussion on falcons and hawks. The pupils told briefly of their experiences. The teacher asked them to note the differences of goshawk and sparrowhawk with the help of a table. In addition to their textbooks, they could use some books of reference on birds. The pupils started their work. Meanwhile, the teacher returned to the pupils of grades 3–4 in order to discuss their findings. Finally, he gave the exercise already started to be finished as homework for the pupils of grades 5–6.

During our observation period in May 1995, we also followed a lesson on Religion and Mathematics for grades 3–6 given by Ulla, the other teacher. First the teacher asked the pupils of grades 3–4 to move to the dining hall to study Religion, and the pupils of grades 5–6 to stay in the classroom to study Mathematics. In the dining hall she gave instructions and worksheets to the pupils of grades 3–4. They were to do an exercise on the confirmation class with their partners. They could use their textbooks and the Bible as works of reference. After the pupils had started on the exercise, the teacher moved on to teach the pupils of grades 5–6 Mathematics. Occasionally she checked on the pairs working on the Religion assignment in the dining hall. At the end of the lesson the teacher gave both groups their homework. Finally the pupils left for a break. The outcome of the work was reviewed by all the participants together the next day.

Teacher: Kalle and Vesa, you work together. Marja and Riikka, you'll be working together. Last time we talked about baptism. What is the next thing in a life of a young person? ... Vesa.
Boy, 4th grade: First communion.
Teacher: Yes, and confirmation classes. Now I have some textbook exercises prepared for you. You'll need a Bible. It might take so long that we won't be able to go through this until tomorrow. Let me tell you what to do. This is the worksheet. First you should read from the Bible the same text we read before. Then you'll have to think what is the particular bit of the text that tells us to have a confirmation class arranged in the parish... Vesku, wait a bit.. Try to find in your textbook what a confirmation camp is and what is meant by confirmation. You have the vocabulary in your books. Read the text really carefully first, though. Then there are a couple of questions about the photo in your books.
Boy, 4th grade: I can be the secretary.

Teacher: So we'd better start so that the girls take question number five first. You will find out what kind of confirmation classes we had here in the municipality in the 1860s. You can read here what the requirements were back then, and what the candidates had to learn and how long it took. All the basic stuff. It might take so long that we have to go through it tomorrow and check if you need to do something more for the assignments, fill in some things.
Girl, 3rd grade: Can we start now?
Teacher: Think about the questions really carefully. Why don't you girls start with exercise 5, as the boys will need it then. As I have always said, the list of contents - it is useful to read it first.

4.4 Learning Materials

4.4.1 Telematic Teaching Experiment

The change of teacher's modes of thinking has to be reflected in the choice of learning materials so that it can be said that curriculum change has influenced the situation in practice as well as in theory (Fullan with Stiegelbauer 1991, 37). For example, new communication technologies are being developed to arrange modern educational opportunities for pupils in small rural schools (Kronlund, Kynäslahti & Meisalo 1995, 45–47). The head teacher of Lahdelma School, Juha, has taken part in development of distance education for small schools in the municipality, the telematic teaching experiment. Since autumn 1995 English has been taught once a week as distance education by a language teacher from Jyväskylä Teacher Training School with the help of a computer network. The aim of the experiment is to teach other languages in addition to English later on.

We have a data link to Norssi [University Teacher Training School]. We use a conference telephone system, so we can actually talk with this group. We have three schools in this municipality participating in this. We have three schools here plus one in Jyväskylä. We try out this teaching in this way and with these connections. We will see if it is suitable for use on a normal school day... Next autumn we are planning to have it regularly. It will be an experiment until the end of the next semester... It will be once a week, probably. One lesson in languages. We'll start with English. In a way we are teaching each other English by turns... One of the things we thought about was to offer one extra language, at least to some levels. (Juha, male teacher.)

4.4.2 Textbooks

The role of textbooks in the planning and implementation of teaching at Lahdelma School is still large, especially in Finnish and Mathematics. More and more, the pupils use textbooks as works of reference in their projects.

As for some of the textbooks, they are a necessity. Some textbooks, like Mathematics, Finnish, English and such, they are obligatory tools. The textbooks help a lot still. Most of the books are written according to the curriculum, though. I must admit that it is easiest just to follow a textbook, if it's one that gives you a lot of guidance. But when we are working on a particular theme then we have to use plenty of other material as well. Then we have to pick out things here and there, and textbooks are not very good for that.... We

use some of the textbooks of modern subjects a lot. We work a lot with a note book in which the pupils collect things. From encyclopedias, textbooks and such. (Juha, male teacher.)

Yes, in grades 1–2 you need to have the textbooks in Finnish and in Maths. Thinking about the 3–4s or the 5–6s, studying Biology, Geography and such, they should have more books, different books, that is. We have tried to put together a collection of books for them to use, books about the same topics but with different angles... There are some problems with the books, though. For example, the books for grades 1–2 are too childish. For instance, the first mathematics books are too easy for a lot of them... The first Finnish books are really miserable.... The first things are good for five-year-olds, too childish for these... The textbooks are quite differentiated. At the moment I am using fewer and fewer textbooks. For example, in Religious Studies and Environmental Studies they are used only for reference, so they can't keep the books when they leave school. And they have to make their own notebooks, they don't get normal workbooks, they have to make their own notebooks by drawing, cutting out pictures and sticking them into books, writing, from preschool on. This is what I do with them. (Ulla, female teacher.)

4.5 Outdoor Education

According to the Lahdelma School curriculum (1995), the opportunities provided by the immediate surroundings and the community are used in teaching. The aim is to provide the pupils with pleasant learning experiences. Financial resources permitting, school camps are arranged so that every pupil will participate in a school camp for one week twice during lower-level school. During our observation period in spring 1995, we observed the lesson on Environmental Studies given by the head teacher, Juha, for the grades 1–2 in the school yard. The class included two pupils from the first grade and four pupils from the second grade. The aim of the lesson was to observe the signs of spring in nature. First the pupils gathered on the steps. The teacher introduced the pupils briefly to the observation of spring. During the walk the teacher guided the pupils across the yard and into the garden behind the storage building. Together they looked at the first signs of spring, plants and animals. The pupils collected some samples to be taken to the class.

Teacher: Why are the buds on this apple tree so late?.. It has been so cold so that they are not so well developed yet. They have been bigger by this time in May sometimes... You can see some green in there. Look at the leaves the way they are in the evening when they go to sleep; and when the sun starts shining in the morning, what will happen then?
Girl, 2nd grade: They will open.
Teacher: Yes... This is a good spot to listen to things... Listen to that, how many different birds can you hear here? Now listen carefully to the birdsong.
Girl, 2nd grade: That is the one.
Teacher: There, right, and you can see it pretty well, on the lower branch. What bird is that?
Girl, 2nd grade: I dunno.
Boy, 2nd grade: Is it a chaffinch?
Teacher: It is a chaffinch. It is the third most common bird in Finland. There are a lot of them here, really many.
Girl, 2nd: There is one.
Teacher: That could be another one. Look at that now, it has kinda rust red colour breast.
Girl, 2nd grade: It's all grey.

Teacher: Yes, a little grey. The throat area is rather red and then it has slightly blue head. I can look it up in the bird book, when we get in.

After the field trip the samples were studied in the class with the help of books about birds. The samples were divided into two groups, animate and inanimate. The conclusions were written on the blackboard as well. Finally, the pupils went for a break.

Teacher: Which one of these is animate and which is inanimate? Put on this desk those things that are inanimate and here those things that are animate.
Boy, 2nd grade: What is this then? Is it animate?
Teacher: This a part of inanimate nature and this is animate. Yes, let's see what. That is right. Sand is inanimate. This is very difficult for me as well, how to explain this. Plants. What are plants then? Inanimate or animate?
Girl, 2nd grade: Animate.
Teacher: Animate, correct. And aren't these plants then?
Pupils: Yes.
Teacher: Yes. And these plants are dead. They have been under the snow during the winter. They are not alive anymore. But I put them in the animate side, because they have been alive.... This is probably stone bramble, but we'll have to have a look at it later on, and go and look for these... We found some clover, that's clear; and then we found some twigs of blackcurrant bush, with some disease. Good. We'll go for a break soon. But keep your eyes open at home as well, for things you might see in spring now... We'll have the break now, but you could write these things down in your notebooks in the beginning of the next lesson.

5 ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

The pupil assessment is mostly qualitative in grades 1-4. For grades 5-6 numerical assessment is used. According to the school curriculum (1995), grades 1-3 are assessed verbally in all subjects. In the fourth grade only Finnish, Mathematics and English are assessed on the traditional numerical scale, but it is utilized in all subjects for grades 5-6. Additionally, the teacher can give mid-term assessments verbally and in written form to the pupils and their parents. The pupils themselves will assess their own learning and processes of learning.

I suppose you could say that we are a bit old-fashioned in this municipality in pupil evaluation. We haven't given in, or rather the senior teachers haven't given in to the expansion of verbal assessment... The marks are given as usual based on attentiveness and showing one's skills in class to a great extent. It is rather difficult to give the marks if you haven't any facts to base them on. That is something about achieving the goals. I try to follow the working processes and observe. That is fairly easy in a small group, knowing the pupils and their working methods well... I have used some self-evaluation, especially in languages teaching. For example, asking how the pupils think they can read, and write, and how they feel about speaking the language. (Juha, male teacher.)

I have kept an eye on the direction of development of individual pupils, not in comparison with the others. I prefer it that way. The kid is competing with him/herself and trying to develop. I think I should encourage them by telling them how they have done well in this

> or that and now they have done this really well. The kids still think that they should get marks for the tests. (Ulla, female teacher.)

According to the school curriculum (1995), the achievements of the school are evaluated in meetings of the teachers, of the school board, and of the parents on the basis of the feedback received from the pupils, parents and the surrounding community. These evaluations will provide the basis for further development of the curriculum.

> We did this evaluation of the school functioning. The parents did it from their point of view... Then we realized the benefits of a small school... I imagine every teacher will evaluate their own work and balance it against the skills of the pupils and their opinions about you. I reckon everyone is thinking these things through. We haven't carried out any evaluation of each other's work, though. (Juha, male teacher.)

> We got the parents to think about the good and bad points in this school... According to the results, they were really satisfied with the school. One of the faults in this is that we have got so few pupils. It would be better if we had more. Then we wouldn't get these pupils alone in a grade... It is rather miserable, being the only one in your class. (Ulla, female teacher.)

6 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this case study was to examine the connections between curriculum change and the school culture in a small rural school. The goal was to examine the effect of change on the planning, implementation and assessment of school work and the teaching carried out by the teacher. The following sections describe the main observations of the characteristics of the work and functioning of the teachers in the small school under study. At the same time the results are evaluated in the light of previous research.

6.1 Management of Change and Stability in School Culture

6.1.1 Contextual Factors

The culture of a school is very resistant to change. According to Sahlberg (1997, 180–181, 184), it can remain unchanged for decades despite all attempts at reform. The opposition to reform might be a result of a conflict between the teacher's own beliefs and the new ideas. Reforms in curricula or equipment only do not necessarily change the teachers' ways of teaching, because these changes require changes in the beliefs, values, expectations, habits, roles, and power structures of the teachers.

Small rural schools have, according to previous research, a unique school culture that differs from that in larger urban schools. The ethos of the small schools acts as an insulation against government directives, so it is easier for the teachers in small schools to retain their old value systems than it is for their

colleagues in larger schools. In this way the teaching remains unchanged, despite any national curriculum reform that might be in progress. (Vulliamy et al. 1997, 111–112; Webb et al. 1997, 114; see also Bell & Sigsworth 1987; Galton & Patrick 1990; Kalaoja 1990a; Kimonen & Nevalainen 1995; Nevalainen 1995; Pirhonen 1993; Vulliamy 1996; Vulliamy & Webb 1995.) The work they performed on the curriculum of Lahdelma School made the teachers think more profoundly about the fundamental ideas underlying the school's functioning. However, the teachers did not have the same need as the teachers in larger schools to plan, manage and formally assess the way their school functioned. This was the result of informal, collegial decision-making. It was easy to be flexible in the school organization and to bring about rapid changes. (See also Atjonen 1993, 175–177; Patrick & Hargreaves 1990, 104–122; Snyder, Bolin & Zumwalt 1992, 416–417; Syrjäläinen 1994, 57.)

The typical contextual problems of small rural schools are geographic isolation, the decrease in pupil numbers and the threat of school closure (Kalaoja 1990a, 39–40; Nevalainen 1995, 91). These factors slowed down the change of school culture in Lahdelma School and the work on the curriculum, because the teachers were not sure about the future of the school.

6.1.2 Resource Factors

The work on the Lahdelma School curriculum was slowed down by the weak financial situation of the country and the local government authority. Even though the workload of the teachers increased considerably, there was no compensation for the development work. In addition, the facilities at Lahdelma School limited the planning and implementation of physical education, in particular. According to the head teacher, personal reasons, especially the lack of leisure time, had drained his strength; so that he had little energy to spare for curriculum making. (See e.g. Atjonen 1993, 177–181; Jauhiainen 1995, 152–15[illegible]; Syrjäläinen 1994, 50–56.) However, the surrounding countryside and its pure ar beautiful nature with its varied ecotypes have provided good starting points for the teaching of Environmental and Nature Studies.

6.1.3 Procedural Factors

Curriculum change, however, has not brought any fundamental changes into the teaching methods of Lahdelma School. Even if there have been always flexible working strategies and a wide freedom to forget the timetable, the teachers believed that the proposed reform would increase this freedom and, consequently, make them change their teaching practices. The history of the school's own innovations is rather short at the moment. The teachers started working on the school-based curriculum after the publication of the new Framework Curriculum for the Comprehensive School in 1994. They started developing the school curriculum primarily because this was laid down in national education policy. (See Carlgren 1999, 53; Webb et al. 1997, 103–105.) Before the 1994 reform, the pedagogical functioning principles employed had remained virtually unchanged for a long time.

In Lahdelma School the curriculum work has been a team effort of the teachers. The base of the planning has been the national Framework Curriculum (Peruskoulun opetussuunnitelman perusteet 1994). The teachers have obtained ideas from in-service training sessions, teachers of other schools, parents of their pupils, the pupils themselves, and also from professional magazines. In particular, the significance of in-service training has been crucial, because it has motivated the planning work of the teachers. (See also Atjonen 1993, 187–188; Fullan 1992, 113–114; Hargreaves 1994, 435–436; Jauhiainen 1995, 183–185; Kosunen 1994, 202–205, 297.) In the in-service training sessions it has been possible for the teachers to sketch new ways of thinking for their own teaching. Moreover, sharing experiences with other teachers has been important. However, the teachers of Lahdelma School felt that in-service training offered no step-by-step instructions on how to proceed in a small school. This has also been one of the observations made in previous research. In-service training for teachers in small schools has been inadequate because the training topics have been planned mainly to meet the needs of large schools. (See e.g. Kalaoja 1991, 102–106, 113; Nevalainen 1995, 294.)

6.1.4 Products of Change

Curricula are social and cultural constructions with practical and interactive aspects. The practical dimension of the curriculum is reflected by the school's syllabus. The interactive part is demonstrated by the actions of the pupils and the teachers in the school. The syllabus is the basis of the planning and implementation of teaching and education in practice. (Cornbleth 1990, 5; Hamilton 1995, 218.) According to the Lahdelma School curriculum (1995) the curriculum is not a fixed and unchanged entity, but can be modified in the light of experience, self-assessment, and the learning results. This complies with the action model currently favoured in Finland. The curriculum work is, as seen by Nikkanen and Lyytinen (1996, 51–52), a participatory process of change. The knowledge and new skills provided by the process are produced in social interaction in a unique school-specific ethos. Guided by individual practical ethics, the teacher interprets the knowledge and skills relevant for the pupils. (Webb et al. 1997, 102.)

The basis for the development of the Lahdelma School curriculum is the framework provided by the national and local curricula. The school curriculum describes the modus operandi and the educational objectives of the school, as well as the lesson allocations, teaching focuses and the arrangements for special-needs education. The curriculum also includes the implementation plan for pupil assessment and the school's effectiveness. Finally, it lists the aims and contents of each subject.

The attempt to add activities involving active learning to the school culture is reflected in the new Lahdelma School curriculum. In particular, the Environmental and Nature Studies are planned as a series of themes. According to the curriculum, the pupil investigates the same theme twice during lower-level education. For the second study, the subject is expanded, for example, by adding a historical angle. Other subjects, too, are added on to relevant themes.

6.2 Features of Reformed and Traditional School Culture

6.2.1 Benefits and Challenges of Teaching

Most of the benefits of small-school working processes reflect current innovative pedagogics, for example, flexible timetabling, individual instruction, independent work by the pupils, outdoor teaching, learning by doing, and close team work between the community and the school. Due to the small size of the class, the pupils have a number of opportunities to contribute to the various activities. (Kalaoja 1990a, 106–107; 1990b, 2–3; Kimonen & Nevalainen 1993, 96; 1995, 102; Laukkanen & Muhonen 1981, 225–276.)

The small size of the teaching groups was one of the teaching benefits at Lahdelma School. Teaching arrangements can be very individual-oriented. Further, the teacher had more time per pupil. Flexible changes in the teaching groups were also possible. However, group work defined according to class level was rather difficult, as there were not enough pupils of the same age. Every autumn the question of whether there was a need for special instruction was raised. Moderate learning disabilities were coped with through remedial teaching, but in difficult cases, a peripatetic special teacher would come by to help once a week. (See e.g. Kalaoja 1990a, 39–40, 43–49; Nevalainen 1995, 91.)

6.2.2 Teaching Methods

The implementation of the new curriculum requires a change in the teachers' ways of thinking and working. These changes need to be reflected in the teaching practices employed. (See Fullan 1987, 214; 1988, 196–197.) In Lahdelma School the curriculum work influenced the teachers' views of knowledge, learning, and education in a more progressive direction. But this change was not reflected in actual teaching practice to any great extent, because during the observation period teaching was rather close to the principles of traditional pedagogics. According to Carlgren (1999, 49), the gap between the reality of teaching and the expectations directed at the teacher can be seen in wider perspective as a difference between theory and practice, and moreover, as the difference between the thinking of the teacher and his/her actions.

In the Lahdelma School curriculum the teachers have come up with a theme unit list for grades 1–6. In practice, theme and project work has taken up approximately a third of the teaching time. At the beginning of the project work implemented during our observation period, the teacher gave the pupils the related topics and working instructions. The pupils worked for a week gathering information about the topic they had chosen. At the end of the week they presented the project results to the other pupils. During project work the pupil groups had to think about the topics more profoundly and independently than they would have done in traditional teacher-centred learning.

The aim is to utilize the opportunities provided by the surroundings of the school and the community in teaching (see e.g. Kimonen 1989). For example, school camps have been organized; so that every pupil has been to a week-long camp during lower-level school.

6.2.3 Learning Materials

A change in the modes of thinking of the teacher is reflected in the chosen teaching equipment and materials. That is a practical demonstration of the curriculum change. (Fullan et al. 1991, 37.) For example, new communication technologies are being developed to arrange modern educational opportunities for pupils in small rural schools (Kronlund, Kynäslahti & Meisalo 1995, 45–47). Lahdelma School has participated in the development of small-school distance education in the municipality - the telematic teaching experiment. The status of textbooks in the planning and implementation of teaching was high, especially in the three Rs. The pupils are using the textbooks of orientating subjects as works of reference in their projects more and more. (See also Kari 1988; Lappalainen 1992.)

6.2.4 Assessment of Pupils and School Functioning

In 1999 the new principles for the evaluation of comprehensive school pupils came into force in Finland. The aim of pupil evaluation is to guide, support and encourage pupils in a positive way according to the basic functions of the school. Evaluation also aims at developing the pupils' predisposition to self-evaluation. This evaluation should be based on the pupils' own learning and growth processes, their premises and aims derived from the curriculum in the process of the planning of teaching. The objects of evaluation should be, in addition to the pupils' results as tested, also in their work and in their whole learning process. One part of the school's educational task is the evaluation of the pupils' behaviour. (Perusopetuksen oppilaan arvioinnin perusteet 1999, 7-8; see also Webb, Vulliamy, Häkkinen & Hämäläinen 1998, 554; Virta 1999, 22-24.)

Learning presupposes an interaction between learner and material to be learnt, with the learner having the active role. A decisive factor in learning is the extent to which the learner is motivated. Thus the pupil's self-evaluation and the teacher's feed-back are of central importance to the learning process. The pupil's self-concept as a learner, a growing human being and a member of his/her working community will develop along the lines of the feedback he/she receives. The feedback and evaluation should be individual, truthful, comprehensive and encouraging, in order for it to support the development of the pupil into a human being aware of him- or herself, and accepting this image. The function of evaluation in the learning process is to support the formation of a realistic picture of him- or herself through interaction and feedback. When the pupil sets the aims for his/her own work, assessing his/her own progress in the learning process, he/she has a good chance of becoming a life-long learner. (Perusopetuksen oppilaan arvioinnin perusteet 1999, 7.)

The Lahdelma School pupil assessment process was primarily based on the behaviouristic concepts of learning outlined in the curriculum of 1985, but it also drew influences from the constructivist premises in the 1994 curriculum. In grades 1-4, pupil evaluation was largely qualitative in nature. In grades 5-6, there was a return to traditional numerative evaluation, but the teachers also gave oral and written feedback to the pupils regarding their schoolwork. In the process of evaluating learning progress, the pupils' own self-evaluations were utilized to

some extent. In addition, the teachers aimed at developing the school's curriculum by themselves evaluating the school's activities. The parents and the whole surrounding community took an active part in this process.

6.3 Factors Promoting and Constraining Changes in School Culture

Table 2 provides a summary of the factors promoting and constraining changes in school culture. These factors are related to context, resources, and processes.

TABLE 2 Factors promoting and constraining a change in school culture in the case-study school

Factors promoting the change	Factors constraining the change
Context - School culture specific to a small rural school. Its features were the flexibility of functional models, and cooperation between the teachers.	**Context** - Geographical isolation and the decrease in pupil numbers added to the threat of school closure. - The threat that the school might be closed down decreased the teachers' motivation to carry out planning work.
Resources - Exploitation of environmental resources and teachers' strengths. - Parents supported the curriculum change.	**Resources** - The inadequate facilities of the school limited the teaching of Physical Education in particular. - Personal reasons of the head teacher, especially the lack of leisure time, reduced opportunities to do more work on the new curriculum. - Due to the weak financial situation of the municipality and the country the teachers were not compensated for overtime work on the curriculum.
Processes Professional development of the teachers: - In-service training gave the teachers new ways of thinking. Teaching: - Small number of pupils facilitated individual instruction and independent learning and a close interaction between the teacher and the pupils. - More pupil and teacher self-assessment was required.	**Processes** Professional development of the teachers: - In-service training was not relevant to the teacher's work in a small school and there were not adequate resources for training. Teaching: - The history of innovation in the school was rather short. - There were not enough pupils of the same age to arrange effective learning based on cooperation. - Theme and project work were not established in teaching. - Pupil assessments, especially in the upper grades, were primarily numerical.

6.4 Towards a Fundamental Change in Educational Practice

Educational reform is, according to Fullan (1993, 20, 37, 67), an unending process of change, with its complexity, dynamism and conflicts. Changes in school organization can be categorized as first- and second-order changes. First-order or incremental changes are deliberate efforts to enhance the existing system by overcoming deficiencies in policies and practices. The aim is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of what is currently done without disturbing the basic organizational features. Such changes are aimed essentially at improving the core features of the organization. Second-order or fundamental changes seek to alter the essential composition of an organization, involving finding new goals, structures and roles. (Fullan et al. 1991, 29; Cuban 1992, 218–219.)

Changes in schools have hitherto been first-order changes. Second-order changes have failed in most cases. The challenge of the 21st century is to find second-order changes which will have a fundamental effect on school culture and structures. (See e.g. Sahlberg 1997, 236–238.) The teacher's learning process and the development of the school are closely related. Transformation of the traditional school context requires the teacher to reflect critically on his/her own principles and practices of action and to transform them. In other words, it requires the creation of a new school context. From the teacher's point of view, innovations in working and the management of change involve a comprehensive learning process. A modern school culture based on progressive pedagogics following the constructivist conception of learning, requires transformative learning. In order to change the context of the school, the teacher needs new models of thinking and action. As a result, a change in the basis of action becomes a double-loop learning process for him/her. This double-loop learning emphasizes the identification and solution of those problems connected with school culture that require the transformation of action principles. (Kimonen & Nevalainen 1995, 121–125; see Argyris & Schön 1976, 19; Kauppi 1993, 87.) The teachers in the case-study school sought to acquire new models of thinking and action. The first result of the transformative learning process was the adoption by teachers of certain topic units. This also presupposed a transformation of the teaching culture, for example, by opting for an activity-oriented approach. However, theme and project work were not yet established in teaching. During the study period, the process of change in this school was just beginning, so the future will show the direction which the school practices will take.

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APPENDIX 1

Pupil statistics of Lahdelma School in school year 1994–1995

Grade level	Girls	Boys	Total	Teaching groups
Preschool	1	2	3	Grades 0–2
1st grade	1	1	2	Grades 0–2 or 1–4
2nd grade	1	1	2	Grades 0–2 or 1–4
3rd grade	1	-	1	Grades 1–4, 3–4 or 3–6
4th grade	1	2	3	Grades 1–4, 3–4 or 3–6
5th grade	1	3	4	Grades 5–6 or 3–6
6th grade	1	1	2	Grades 5–6 or 3–6
Total	7	10	17	

THE CURRICULUM PROCESS IN MÄKILAMPI SCHOOL

Kirsti Häkkinen

1 INTRODUCTION

This case study aims at describing one school's practice that has been strongly affected by changes carried out in educational legislation during the past few years. As official school policy is covered elsewhere in this report, the main emphasis in this article lies in the teaching and learning practice.

The research strategy involved semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The interviews of Local Educational Administrators (LEA), teachers, parents, and students were tape-recorded and transcribed. The fieldwork period involved a one week intensive observation in each of the three classrooms which were selected to ensure diversity in terms of teaching and learning styles. Observations were scheduled for 13.2.-17.2.1995, 20.2.-24.2.1995 and 20.3.-24.3.1995. During the fieldwork period, the researcher used shadowing as a technique of observation (see Reder 1993; Sachs 1993). One day of the week, the researcher followed the class teacher, two days she observed two pupils more closely, and the rest of the time was used for attending staff meetings and making general observations in the class. Information from these different sources of data was drawn together in an analysis which seeks to reveal the genuine feelings and thoughts the teachers, students, parents and the school administrators had concerning the 1994 national educational reform. In order to provide a reader with a rich description of the school reality, I let the subjects speak for themselves through numerous interview quotes.

2 THE INITIAL STAGE OF CURRICULUM PLANNING

Mäkilampi Lower Level Comprehensive School is a middle-sized urban school which has always participated in Finnish curriculum development experiments. The development of the school-based curriculum in Mäkilampi informally began in 1989 when the teachers started to create 'their own school' which would be based on integrated and ungraded teaching. The initiative for the project originated from a team involving the headteacher, the Municipal Director of Education, and one innovative class teacher. The school was eager to involve municipal school administration in the project because at that time the Government appropriated LEAs with lump sums for supporting educational innovations which enabled municipalities to allocate additional financial resources and reimbursement for teachers who undertook planning work. Additional resources and publicity were regarded as essential since the school had faced several threats of closure during the past ten years. The headteacher also had personal interest in the development of teaching while he had undertaken the duties of a municipal teacher-tutor and attended a comprehensive In-Service Training (INSET) programme aimed at promoting the implementation of integrated teaching in schools.

Another incentive for the school development process was the retirement of staff leading to an influx of teachers who shared common interest in experimental teaching. In this phase, the curriculum leadership rested primarily on one innovative teacher whom the headteacher had invited for a post from another school nearby. This teacher was known for her contract work teaching system which allowed pupils flexible time tabling during the school week. The teacher describes her role as a curriculum leader in the beginning of the planning process:

> KH: Do you mean that you draw others after you into different experiments?
> TE: Yes. Or that is what I've done earlier. When I came to this school, I felt that many things were at my responsibility and that I had to tell many things to others and teach them as well as guide them, to show them step by step. Now I've consciously tried to minimize my role as "a teachers' teacher" and to encourage teachers to foster their own ideas. And now I've noticed - as a teacher sees it when she has achieved a certain aim with pupils - that I've reached with these teachers an important goal: their interest has risen for thinking up new ideas and reflecting them and, in general, for participating in things.

In the teachers' planning meetings, this teacher frequently initiated discussion with new ideas on how to improve teaching and made remarks concerning other teachers' suggestions. Curriculum leadership seemed to be divided between this teacher and the headteacher although the headteacher denied it in the interview. He stated that this innovative teacher gave new initiatives, but in his view she often sought for his approval on new projects. However, co-operation between these teachers was one of the cornerstones in the school's development work because it seemed to function well and led to new initiatives.

After this teacher had become a member of the staff, another teacher specialized in integrated teaching entered the school. These staff appointments were facilitated by *Free Municipality Experiment* (see Nikkanen et al. 1993) and

Aquarium Project (see Syrjäläinen 1993a;1993b; 1994; Merimaa 1995). Together with these experiments, the new educational legislation delegated the responsibility in the process of appointing teachers to posts to the headteacher and the teaching staff. The responsibility of the school boards was now limited to dispatching job advertisements to newspapers having negotiated with the school as to the type of post they wish to advertise. Although the interviewed LEA had earlier had some doubts whether the new system would bring about arbitrary appointments, they no longer had this fear. The LEA rather felt that the current system provided schools with improved opportunities for shaping their profile through having the freedom to select teachers who are committed to their way of teaching. In Mäkilampi, the selection process involved all the teachers:

KH: How would you describe the system of staff appointments?
TE: At that time applicants sent their papers to the municipal education office and from there they were passed on to us... Then a bundle of papers arrived from each applicant, and they were publicly displayed in our school.
KH: Yes, do you mean to all teachers?
TE: Yes, to us teachers. And as we are a small school everybody could see them. As I understand it, in bigger schools there is a certain group of teachers who see those papers and who make the decision. And then we chose a few candidates for interview. —
KH: How would you describe these interviews? Who was involved from your staff?
TE: All of us. Yes, we were a small community at that time, there were only Pekka and Maija and was there Leena...? And me. I think we made those interviews as relaxed as possible as that they were not too formal, scary and nerve-racking. But anyway, all the important questions were asked. Then there were these two people who emerged from the interviews, and we wanted one of them.
KH: Did you decide in advance who would ask what questions?
TE: Yes we did. Or I could say that we had the freedom to choose the questions in advance and I think everybody thought about the questions that they would ask. And we also had the chairperson of the governors with us. —
KH: Did you make the final decision together which one to select?
TE: No because they were both valuable to us. We really felt that either of them could become a member of our working community. The final decision was made by the headteacher.

The headteacher's role increased considerably in the process of staff selection, a development that teachers felt brought drawbacks as well as benefits. On the positive side, the decisions are no longer made anonymously as the headteacher now bears the final responsibility. On the other hand, in the event of the appointment later proving to be unsuccessful, the headteacher may be subjected to staff criticism. This situation was evident in the school as one of the teachers had formed an opposition group which was perceived as trying to undermine other teaching staff. Although the headteacher did not admit it, he clearly regretted for appointing the teacher who frequently criticized other teachers' ideas. He mentioned in the interview that the last staff selection had taken a long time since there were two possible candidates for the post. This teacher was selected because he had better references and teaching certificates. In the following staff appointments, more attention was paid in the applicants' favourable attitude towards the school's teaching system. In the policy level, the headteacher, however, maintained that such a selection system may lead to the

working community becoming unbalanced if the aim becomes to fill posts with one type of teacher. According to other teachers, this kind of situation would impoverish teaching and foster uncritical attitudes towards policies pursued by the school.

The decision to join the *Aquarium Project* was obviously not unanimous in the school. The critical teacher reflected the feelings of a number of other teachers in Finland concerning the beginning of the project:

> KH: If I remember right, you said last time that you were against joining it [the Aquarium Project]?
>
> TE: I was opposed to it because it would have been like going to war with fiddles - we didn't have a chance of making a proper curriculum because of the scarcity of resources. Another reason was that everybody threw in fine ideas but nothing concrete as to what we should do. And later I heard from the people who were there that it was exactly as I feared it would be. *The present generation of authorities have problems because their posts may be discontinued so they have to get their names into the history books. Then they can tell the directors of finance that we need them.* Directors of finance are not experts in education so it's a waste of time to justify to them what we are doing here, and luckily we don't have to because they don't know themselves what is going on. At that time even the National Board of Education didn't know, maybe they have now had to invent something. But at that time they first needed Aquarium municipalities which were trying to raise their profile as educational districts. And then these educational districts needed a few schools under the threat of closure which agreed to do the dirty work in order to improve their image. There was one perfect victim: our school.

The motives behind the Aquarium Project have also been questioned elsewhere in Finland (Syrjäläinen 1993a).

Although the decision to join this project was not completely unanimous, the interviewed LEA regarded it as a positive development that the desire on the part of the teachers was not to impose a uniform style of teaching on staff. One parent also stated that the headteacher has endeavoured to create a community that can function even where there are diverse views. Ultimately, all the school's teachers were persuaded to join the process of curriculum development which began with a discussion on values.

3 EXAMINING THE UNDERLYING VALUES FOR THE CURRICULUM

The *Framework Curriculum for Comprehensive Schools 1994* emphasizes the clarification of a set of values as a basis for school work. The teachers in Mäkilampi School decided to use values as a point of departure regarding their curriculum development:

> KH: How did you teachers start to process the curriculum?
>
> TE: --- Once we covered the staffroom walls with white papers. Then each teacher could write different value statements on these papers whenever they wanted to, and then we finally put them all together. We started to think about which of

> these sentences would match, and we tried to find a good wording for them and to make sentences look nice. I suppose that you've seen that paper which says 'these are the values in which we are committed to'? --- And if someone does not want to read the whole curriculum document, he can look at this page and realize that 'hey, this is the idea here'.

Parental opinion was elicited through questionnaires which requested them to specify the values they felt were important in the work of the school. Based on this feedback and on staff meetings, the teachers compiled a set of sixteen statements about the values which should guide the education and teaching in the school.

All the teachers interviewed regarded these discussions as important, some of them believing them to have been the most important part of the whole curriculum planning process. The importance of value discussions in writing school-based curriculum is also emphasized by Mehtäläinen (1994), who discovered that the majority of discussions on underlying values also included teachers' self-reflection on important aspects of school life.

Although processing teachers' own attitudes towards teaching and learning was not always easy, one school administrator observed that the curriculum planning process in this school was not as arduous as it had proved for teachers in some other schools because the teachers were already used to co-operation in developing their own teaching system. This municipal school consult attended the planning meetings especially at this beginning stage, and (she) had also spent time on assessing lessons which facilitated teachers to restructure their teaching system.

Most of the teachers in Mäkilampi School expressed a positive attitude towards the visits of this municipal educational administrator to the school, especially at the initial stage of curriculum planning. They felt they had benefited from her ideas of the development of teaching. The educational administrator, however, admitted that her participation in the school-based curriculum development was mainly supportive, the major responsibility on curriculum making resting on teachers themselves.

The school's own curriculum document commences with a series of value statements regarding pupils' relationships with themselves, their classmates, work, country, other cultures, and also regarding their relationship to nature. The importance of social skills and information processing skills are also highlighted. These values generally follow the aims set by the National Board of Education's *Framework Curriculum for Comprehensive Schools 1994*. This document seeks to promote in schools:

- sustainable development
- multiculturalism, internationalization, and a sense of cultural identity
- physical, mental, and social well-being
- growth as a member of society.

These four aims are reflected in Mäkilampi School's curriculum document which seeks to couch them in concrete terms. For example, one sentence describing the principle of sustainable development states: "We will live healthily and without unnecessary waste". The school's educational policy is centred on the child's needs and on fostering pupil self-esteem.

According to one teacher who was interviewed the school, curriculum document reflects teachers' conceptions of knowledge acquisition and of future learning needs. She maintained that the teaching staff has attempted to create an image for the school through designing a curriculum which reflects their own values. However, the interviewee did not specify what such an image consisted of.

In general, the underlying values presented in this school's curriculum document resemble those mentioned in the *Framework Curriculum for the Comprehensive School 1994*. Also the educational research has indicated no clear differences in value statements between different schools (von Wehrt 1993).

4 REORGANIZING THE CURRICULAR CONTENTS

After the first phase, curriculum planning was carried out in pairs:

> KH: What happened after the value discussion?
> TE: Then we started to do it in pairs, do you follow? We also had a number of meetings together wherever and whenever. Once we had a meeting around a fireplace, and once we were somewhere in a restaurant meeting room and many times at the school. We tried to break away from the school environment. In pairs we continued to think about contents and units of study and working methods and evaluation for first to second year groups, for third to fourth year groups and for fifth to sixth year groups. All this kind of stuff. We tried to cut out the inessentials so that we didn't write into that lesson plan every single lesson and what the teacher says here first.. and what next; we wanted to make study units. We left it flexible.

As a result of this working phase, the school curriculum document was furnished with theme lists for each year group. While planning the themes, the teachers wished to take into account student interests and also to incorporate topical material. This was reflected in the introduction of a study unit on dinosaurs during the release of *Jurassic Park* and in the "Children in Europe" theme which was undertaken while Finland was involved in discussions over EU membership.

In the school curriculum document, the aims and the contents of teaching are presented in paired year groups (1-2, 3-4, 5-6). The subject division here includes Environmental and Natural Studies, Mathematics, Design (Textile Work, Technical Work, and Craft), Media Education, English, Swedish, and Music. In this section, the contents of teaching are presented in the form of a list. Teaching in the school is based on cross-curricular themes which may last from one to six weeks. Although the contents of these theme periods are presented in paired year groups, there are a number of whole school themes during the year. Such themes in 1994-1995 included "Children in Europe" and "Friendship" and involved mixed year group tasks.

The reorganization of the curricular contents aroused very different reactions amongst the teaching staff. One of the teachers expressed a positive attitude towards a school-based curriculum system because it allowed her more

freedom to restructure cross-curricular themes and to use mixed year groups. However, she also mentioned that this advantage was not utilized by all the teachers:

> KH: Does this curriculum reform enable schools to decide individually what they want to teach?
>
> TE: Yes. I've found it so flexible that I can carry out teaching personally. Yet, although we've never had national tests in individual subjects, teachers are very conservative as they still count on it. *Many teachers think that a book is the same as the curriculum: 'When they say in this book that these things belong to this year group I've got to go them through'*. I think it'll take a hundred years until teachers learn to do it differently.

Also the educational research indicates that many teachers still rely heavily on the textbook (see Kari 1988). On the other hand, the freedom in using different teaching methods is not entirely a consequence of the 1994 curriculum reform because the above interviewed teacher has used her present system of teaching over a period of ten years. Another teacher preferred the former national curriculum because it included a comprehensive list of learning contents for different subjects enabling teachers to choose relevant learning materials for each year group. This teacher felt that the introduction of a school-based curriculum threatened uniformity in teaching:

> KH: What do you think about this school-based curriculum?
>
> TE: The carrying idea amongst teachers seems to be that as it is only school-based it can't be a comprehensive curriculum. In my view it has lead to a situation where teachers try to say everything with a few empty phrases, including all these things which no one has courage to question. In other words, *if you want to look at the mathematics section and discover what you're expected to teach all you'll find there is a high-sounding phrase which is in reality specified by a textbook or by the old curriculum.*

This teacher further claimed that most of the school-based curricula maintain typical subject division which lays more emphasis on core subjects while neglecting 'less important' subjects such as physical education. In his view, this subject compartmentalization should be taken into a more analytic direction which would prevent many psychological pitfalls where a child is afraid of failing in mathematics if he in reality has earlier failed in algebra. He regards the subject teacher system as a barrier to this kind of development:

> TE: These subject groups are kept up by the university and - from the school's point of view - the subject teacher training. Just go and tell a mathematics teacher that the subject called mathematics doesn't exist! When you go to tell about the curriculum to the teachers in an upper level comprehensive school the woodwork teacher may come to bluster you when his students are sawing logs into round pieces: 'can you imagine that this kid still doesn't know the pi'. *According to his view, the pi should be taught during a mathematics lesson when it is not needed; whereas it is not a duty of a woodwork teacher to teach it when pupils would need it. The school becomes a meaningless game in which you are rewarded with grades if you can do it well. Yet you should learn skills and knowledge that you could put into practice.*

This view also gets support from the researchers as von Wehrt (1993) claims that the 1994 curriculum reform ignores teacher education as an important factor in the development of school instruction. In his view it is difficult to motivate even recently graduated teachers for curriculum development work if their education at the university is still based on behaviouristic didactic principles.

5 REORGANIZING LESSON HOURS

In the earlier *Framework Curriculum for Comprehensive Schools* (1985), the maximum and minimum hours per subject were specified for each year group. The lesson hour quota outlined in the 1994 framework curriculum no longer indicates the pupil ages for starting subjects, neither does it dictate the maximum number of hours for different subjects. It prescribes only a minimum number of hours per subject during the whole duration of lower level comprehensive schooling (6 years) allowing schools to decide the weighting of different subjects within each year group. In Mäkilampi School, a number of lesson hours have been allocated to each subject although the total number of lesson hours per subject does not differ significantly from the outline offered by the National Board of Education. The only exception is with regard to the arts which have been allocated four extra hours. Accordingly, the curriculum document itself reflects the results of earlier experiments which failed to bring about flexible lesson hour quotas for schools (Jokinen 1991).

The distribution of lesson hours in the school curriculum document, however, does not reflect the actual teaching practices. One teacher even claims that reforms are easier to carry out in practice than on paper:

KH: What do you think about subject changes at the lower level comprehensive? Is it possible under the present system?
TE: *In reality it is, but on paper, no.*
KH: Why's that?
TE: Because the act tells you that you have to teach certain subjects.
KH: Is this reform, then, a surface phenomenon only?
TE: In this sense yes. It doesn't give you new choices. For example we have clear subject divisions about how many hours teaching you have to give in each subject per week.

In her view, the written curriculum becomes easily a dead letter which gives a very faint picture of the curriculum in practice. Also one parent noted that as the contract work system is based on integrated teaching, the allocation of lesson hours becomes meaningless for teaching practice. Also the researcher observed no evidence that the school curriculum itself would compel teachers to use the same teaching methods; rather that teachers had freedom to invent their own system of working with their classes. In educational research, this situation is regarded as a positive tendency because it lays more emphasis on continuous development work in schools instead of stressing the curriculum document itself (see Mehtäläinen 1994).

6 ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

The last phase of the school-based curriculum development process occupied the teachers with the questions of pupil assessment and school self evaluation. These issues are stated in the school curriculum document itself: "evaluation is a continuous, multidimensional, and interactive process which is used as a tool for developing the school. The process of developing the evaluation is based on the school's own plans. The pursuit of school aims is realized in ways that allow the results to be evaluated. Efforts are made to ensure that the aims match those values teachers and parents regard as important."

6.1 Pupil Assessment

According to the school-based curriculum, the pupil assessment involves the following components:

- Self-evaluation forms for each term which have been designed by teachers. A new method of evaluation to be implemented is portfolios.
- Pupil assessment that is accomplished twice a year: at the end of the autumn term, the evaluation is carried out orally together with pupils and their parents or guardians whereas the spring term assessment is based on the Arwo computer program.
- Numerical grades are employed only at the end of the sixth year.

The methods of pupil assessment varied considerably between classes because individual pupil assessment forms reflect the teachers' personalities and their degree of commitment to the development of evaluation. One innovative teacher has, for example, completely reworked the assessment system at the end of the school year. She now utilizes the portfolio as the main method of evaluation although she has also involved parents' letters to their children and letters from children to each other as a form of evaluation. In her class, one student's portfolio included an essay, self-assessment comments about the progress made during the theme period, a description of a visit to a museum, photographs of the student taken by the teacher during lessons, an individual project, an account of an interview, mother tongue tasks, formal assessment carried out at the end of the autumn term, drawings, and a series of class test papers. In general, teachers maintained that the portfolio system facilitates more accurate observation of pupil progress during the school year.

The parents who were interviewed felt that the school's current system of evaluation provided them with a fuller account of a child's progress than the traditional numerical grades. During assessment meetings, the parents acquired more information about the school curriculum together with concrete facts concerning the contents and the aims for each school year. For one of the parents the assessment meeting itself was a learning experience:

> MO: I remember when I argued with Pirkko about multiplication tables asking whether you have to know them by heart or is it like she learned them at the beginning by

> working them out? Then we thought that we would talk about it later in the assessment meeting whether it was necessary or not. And when we were there, I asked the teacher if she needed to know them by heart so that she could answer straight away. So the teacher, it was really good, he didn't say yes or no to that. He said, "Well, what do you think about it, Pirkko?" Well then Pirkko said that, "Well sometimes I may be in a hurry but so far I haven't been in such a hurry that I have no time to work it out." Then the teacher accepted it and said "If you feel like that then that's your answer. There is no other answer to that question." This incident taught me what this self-assessment is all about. It means that the child really sets the aims herself.

The pupil's mother also reported that the main learning goals for the school year are presented in the first parents' meeting at the beginning of the autumn term. The interviewed parents were surprised at the accuracy with which children evaluated their own work and also the severity of their assessments. Their children tended to be more critical towards themselves than their teachers, the situation which reflects experiences in other Aquarium schools (see Mehtäläinen 1994).

Also the styles of continuous evaluation of learning varied substantially across the three observed year groups. This fluctuation was evident in pupil conceptions about the assessment of learning. The experiences described by one pupil in one class reflect a teacher centred model of evaluation:

KH: How is learning assessed?
ST: Our teacher has tests. —
KH: What happens after the test when he corrects the papers?
ST: Then we look at them and there is a mark "v" for wrong answers and if it's right then there is a line and two dots.
KH: Do you correct them or does the teacher do it?
ST: The teacher.
KH: What happens when he gives the papers back?
ST: Then we compare them with each other to see who has the most points.
KH: Don't you change the wrong answers into the right ones?
ST: No.
KH: Yes. Do you have tests in any other subjects than mathematics?
ST: There haven't been many others.
KH: Well. What about in biology for example?
ST: Our teacher gives us reading for homework and then he asks us questions the next day.
KH: What happens if you don't know the answer to a question?
ST: You have to raise your hand and then you get a question.
KH: Are there always the same people who answer?
ST: Yes.
KH: How about those who seldom or never raise their hands?
ST: The teacher doesn't want anything more than the answers.

In two other observed classes, pupils usually corrected their work with their teachers on Fridays. During one correction session, one of these teachers asked questions about mother tongue tasks and the pupils answered from their own notebooks while in other subjects pupils exchanged notebooks. Most of the students in this year group responded positively to this system of evaluation:

KH: Are you ever irritated by correction?
ST: I'm not because it's only correction. It's really good thing for yourself. It's lousy if you notice that you have forgotten to do something and then the teacher asks you: "Now it's Maisa's turn to answer the question." It's really awful feeling when you notice that you've been careless and left work unfinished. --- And if you have misunderstood one exercise then you know it the next time. So that if you don't know it, the teacher says to someone else, "Give Maisa a little help with this so that she can say what it is."
KH: What if you get a task wrong, for example all your mathematics answers are wrong?
ST: Yes. During the week when you have finished mathematics exercises, you can find the right answers from the back of the book. ---
KH: How do you feel about the way you learn here?
ST: I think we learn as well as they do in other schools. Yes, and then there is this thing that we don't have to listen to teachers going blah, blah, blah all the time. We can take part in things ourselves.

Pupils' behaviour suggested that the teacher's emphasis on students' continuous self-evaluation had made them more aware of their own learning process. As one boy was engaged in writing a bus stop task on Vikings, he suddenly stated aloud, "Look teacher, with these tasks we replace mother tongue during this week". Similarly to this example, students were continuously required to consciously observe their own learning in two of the observed classes which used contract work system as a basis for teaching. In group work, feedback provided by the teachers was accompanied with pupils' comments on each others' processes and outcomes of learning. The teachers' communication with their pupils was predominantly positive, and they regularly praised their students. The children seemed to be motivated to study as there occurred no interruptive behaviour in either of the classes during the period of observation.

6.2 School-based Evaluation

The school-based curriculum document presents the following issues as areas of importance in the whole school assessment: teachers' work, the headteacher's work, and the school's functioning on the level of school community. Teachers' work is annually evaluated in a meeting with colleagues where also the questionnaire filled in by parents is reviewed. Other indicators of teachers' success in their work are pupils' commitment to schoolwork and INSET obtained and given by teachers themselves. The main stress in monitoring the headteacher's work is gauged by co-operation between the members of the school community and their contentment with their work. Working atmosphere has been measured with a HePoTa (psychological) test. The assessment of the school's functioning on the level of the school community embraces students, all members of the staff and the school board, parents as well as the members of parents' association. According to the curriculum document, all these parties are expected to approve the underlying values which form the basis for the development work carried out in the school. It also emphasizes a need for continuous self-evaluation and specification of the key areas which promote the development of the school's functioning.

During the February planning meeting, teachers carried out some evaluation of their work. The aim of this meeting was to focus attention on the purpose of self-evaluation and to generate ideas about different forms of self-evaluation. The meeting examined the following areas: evaluation carried out by parents, children's reactions to tasks as a form of continuous evaluation, and teachers' mutual evaluation. Conversation in this meeting was conducted by the headteacher who first introduced two models describing working communities: iceberg vs. volcano theories. He felt that teachers had been aware of the top of the iceberg, but from now on they could focus more attention on the part under water. In self-evaluation, he underlined the significance of concentrating teachers' energy on issues instead of attitudes. In his view, it was also important to be able to accept both positive and negative feedback. After the introduction, alternative methods of evaluating the school profile were discussed which raised a numerical assessment carried out by parents as one of the options. This suggestion was, however, abandoned because teachers felt that parents would not necessarily interpret questions correctly and give honest answers to them. One teacher highlighted the importance of using negative feedback as a source of self-development.

The self-evaluation meeting also partly uncovered the roles of different teachers in the school community. The discussion was predominantly guided by two teachers: the headteacher and the deputy head teacher. Although all the teachers participated in the conversation, most of the concrete suggestions for developing self-assessment were initiated by the deputy head. She put forward the idea of each teacher opting for topics in which they had been successful and in which they needed more practice. This comment brought up two issues of importance from other teachers: a need to increase co-operative planning between the teachers and to reformulate the school's insufficient premises. Another observation by the deputy head in the middle of the conversation also illustrates the way in which she has internalized assessment *'in fact this ..hat we are doing now is self-assessment'*.

As a consequence of the meeting, the teachers decided to select three key areas in their own work which would benefit from feedback. Teachers would then compose a written form of evaluation based on these feedback statements during the following meeting. The interview with the headteacher revealed three recurrent areas of discussion in the sequence of teacher development meetings: discussion about key issues in the curriculum, the need to improve teacher co-operation, and the drafting of a positive letter written to a teaching colleague. The idea for this letter originated from a course on student assessment portfolios. The headteacher perceived the self-evaluation process as ultimately involving all of the school's staff. He also believed that teachers' self-assessment had become an integral part of the school evaluation.

6.3 School Evaluation as a Part of Total Quality Management

In the 1994 Curriculum Reform, a new mode of management has been accompanied with the decentralization of decision making: Total Quality Management. In one teacher's view, this means that the school budget on the

municipal level is partly tied to the teachers' willingness to attend different development programmes and to report on them to LEA:

> I know, for example, that the municipal director of education came to our school to demand an A4-paper from teachers which they were not eager to make. One of the teachers was even brave enough to ask him 'what happens if we don't do it?' So the director answered 'if you don't do the paper I won't give you money'. It was a direct answer to a direct question. These principles of management by results are implemented in the way where part of the school's budget is no more connected to pupil rolls or other neutral things, but it reflects the conception the LEAs have about teachers' eagerness to enter into development programmes.

The evaluation of schools' own curricula has been one of the key areas of recent municipal policy on education. According to a representative from the local educational authority, schools should be given the freedom to shape their own method of self-assessment. However, the interviewee pointed out that a duty to carry out self-evaluation was required by the National Board of Education:

> KH: Where has this demand for school self-evaluation come from? Is it required by the central administration as a part of this reform?
>
> LEA: Yes, I suppose in a way *it has to be initiated by municipalities*. So I think it emerged from the 1994 national curriculum reform when they started to talk about the self-evaluation of schools...and especially at a level where it hasn't been carried out before, as to how the schools can evaluate their work. And *this is the thing which has raised a lot of criticism and conflicts because this kind of thing has never been done in school communities*.
>
> KH: I suppose that the schools are a little afraid of it...
>
> LEA: *Of course they are worried about it especially if they are thinking about being ranked*. This is why the evaluation has to be carried out in a way that sets up a dialogue between schools and us so that the criteria and the indicators are not imposed by outsiders, but we try to do this work together.

The headteacher mentioned in the interview that the self-assessment of schools has become a necessity when evaluating the effectiveness of school functioning. He, however, disapproved the manner in which this task was delegated to schools by the educational authorities. Despite of the fact that the school self-evaluation is not tackled in the *Framework Curriculum for Comprehensive Schools 1994*, school-based curricula were nevertheless expected to comprise chapters on schools' self-evaluation as well as the effectiveness of the school. Also the school's self-evaluation meetings revealed that pressure has been exerted by the school authorities compelling schools to carry out self-evaluation. During one meeting, the headteacher warned the teaching staff that a failure on the part of the school to examine its own curriculum would result in such work being undertaken by outsiders in a manner which would not necessarily correspond to the school's way of working. Completion of the first evaluation form had to be submitted to the board of governors by the end of April before being passed on to the municipal board of education.

The interviewed LEA's quote above also elucidates another perceived problem area in the new evaluation system: the ranking of schools. Further reforms will take place with regard to official catchment areas which are now

being dissolved. This reform expands the role played by parents and pupils in the selection of schools. According to the headteacher and an education authority representative, this reform will have little impact on school rolls because parents tend to choose the nearest school for the sake of children's safety. However, it was noted that the removal of official catchment areas had led to increased competition for pupils between Helsinki schools. Another teacher regarded increasing competition between schools as a real threat:

> KH: Does this mean that schools begin to compete with each other?
> TE: There is this kind of vision in which they favour the differentiation of schools. The schools are shaping their profiles, and then you can put your kids at any school. This model is already being used in Hämeenlinna, for example, where schools make brochures on themselves which are then distributed to homes. In other words, this means that we meet with a 30 years' setback in social justice.
> KH: Do you mean inequality?
> TE: Yes, the children whose parents belong to the active upper class will get better educated.

In other large towns, the competition has become so intense that schools refuse to give their curricula to one another. This factor may also have been behind the headteacher's request to allow access to our copy of the school's curriculum document only to the research team.

In Mäkilampi School, the competition for pupils partly originated from the threat of closure and the start of the school development work began five years ago when discussions about closing small schools were in progress. At present, the headteacher is of the view that the positive reputation enjoyed by the school would make it difficult for political decision makers to close it. One parent also added that the reputation of the school has a strong impact on parental choice:

> KH: Is Hakkila part of the school's catchment area?
> MO: Yes. The boundary is there so that not all those who wanted to could come to the school. Then there was a terrible conflict in the first year group between those who were allowed to come here and those who had to go to other schools. Then there was another conflict in Viljo's class when they had to send some of them to other schools. *Then there was a terrible discussion about selection principles.* There was even a certain street boundary there and then if the pupil had a sibling in the school then they were allowed to stay. But the biggest conflicts have been started by angry parents who haven't managed to get their children into the school. *It is a curious thing this kind of reputation. Of course the parents ask each other a lot of questions. Even now many parents with children of preschool age have come to ask from me if it would be possible to get their children into this school.*

The headteacher described the responsibility for the selection of pupils which ultimately rests with him as stressful, and the compulsory transfer of pupils has resulted in angry parental reactions. He added that schools will have to have at least some kind of catchment area in the future because pupil rolls will be limited by the size of the school buildings.

7 PARENTAL AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The degree of parental participation in the school work is dependent on the class teacher and the willingness of parents to contribute. One teacher's class had visited a doctor's surgery and the local radio station where some of the parents worked. In another class, a parent who was a pediatrician transformed the classroom into a hospital for the day. According to one parent, the teachers frequently call upon parental expertise in their teaching, and they also require learning materials to be brought from homes on almost a weekly basis. The parent also felt that the feedback from parents' evenings had a direct effect on teaching. The interviewee believed that parents had a real opportunity to influence the school's teaching:

MO: I think that there's the feeling that you can make a suggestion and they [the teachers] will take it into account. They try to organize things using the resources they have. And if they want to organize a certain club, they use parents who have special expertise in that field. — Then they use us in those school camps and class visits. And then they have an open doors policy. They welcome you there whenever you want to go.

KH: Aha, to follow the teaching?

MO: Yes to follow teaching and maybe to act as an assistant teacher. And at the beginning, my son's class was visited by very many parents. They came to listen to their children reading aloud. This was because the teacher was very busy and there were pupils at very different stages of reading and that's why so many parents came in.

One official channel for parental participation in school affairs is through the board of governors. A member of the board stated that their function included endorsing the curriculum and to decide on the distribution of lesson hours. The board also approves building repairs and the selection of the deputy heads. The interviewee mentioned that the board has endeavoured to adjust its role from controlling to supporting the school development work:

KH: Has it [the board of governors] earlier been more of a controlling body?

MO: Earlier its duties were defined as approving the school rules for maintaining class discipline. That is one of the board's duties. Then if there are pupils to be expelled, these kinds of difficult cases, or other conflicts, they have been brought to the board.

KH: Does it happen now or was it in the past?

MO: In the past. But as the situation had changed so much in the autumn, we then had to create new rules for maintaining discipline. And we did it by also including children. Each class thought about what would be a fair set of rules. And then one pupil from each class was a representative in a rule making group. Then this group made suggestions and then they talked these over with teachers and then finally they brought it to the board of governors which of course had the sensitivity to approve it officially. We thought that the most important outcome of this was that the children are more committed to these rules when they have done them themselves. So I think that all the members of the board were sensitive enough to bless it. We did not feel it was our duty to dictate those rules.

Pupils themselves had proposed that a detention system should be included in the class rules which was then approved by teachers. These rules, which were

mainly concrete behavioural instructions, were posted on the wall of each classroom where they were signed by the pupils.

An alternative channel of parental input is offered by parents' committees which are drawn from the parents of pupils within a single class. These arrange class visits and parties although the level of activity in these committees varies considerably from class to class.

Research indicates that in most of the municipalities involved in the *Free Municipality Experiment* significant changes occurred in the local education authority (see Nikkanen 1993a). School boards were combined with other boards (usually with library and culture board). Some of the boards of governors were discontinued, and, therefore, their duties were transmitted to parents' committees or heads of the schools. This tendency is, however, disapproved by Nikkanen (1993b) who rather views the board of governors as an important instrument in school development. His study revealed that usually the members of these boards were not well informed of their opportunities for influencing teaching in the school. These bodies should become more efficient channels for parents and students to participate in school development process. He also notified that the closure of the board of governors does not enable municipalities to decentralize decision making; it rather diminishes the role of parents and students in educational policy (Nikkanen 1991).

8 DISCUSSION

In this concluding chapter, I want to discuss some themes on curriculum development that emerged from Mäkilampi School's teaching and learning practices. The themes of importance are: curriculum leadership and the roles of different persons in the development of the school-based curriculum, teachers' commitment to the curriculum, and the evaluation of curriculum.

By adopting innovations, the school leadership assumes a significant role (for example, Mehtäläinen 1984; Syrjäläinen 1992). In this school, the headteacher endeavoured to promote egalitarian decision making by including teachers in the interviews of candidates for posts although he bore the final responsibility for the appointments. As the appointments were earlier included in the duties of the school boards, the 1994 curriculum reform seems to increase the headteacher's influence on decision making, a trend which has been met with both approval and resistance. Most of the teachers approved of the present system because it brings the decisions concretely to the school.

In this school, the curriculum leadership was divided between the headteacher and the deputy head. This situation clearly indicates the significance of innovations in the school development work - those teachers that individually design new methods of teaching are likely to become leaders of the curriculum development. This is even more probable to happen in larger schools where the headteacher is loaded with a large amount of administrative work, therefore unable to participate fully in experiments at the classroom level. In general,

curriculum reform has shifted a large amount of administrative work to schools from municipal school offices. (See Hämäläinen & Jokela 1993, 40-54.)

Shifting the emphasis from equal opportunities policy into increased freedom in choosing individual education for pupils, *Free municipality experiment* also reflected changes in the economic and political context in the Finnish society (cf. Niiranen 1993). This freedom received an ambivalent reception because the parties were not clear which roles they should adopt. From the teachers' point of view, at the beginning of the Aquarium project, nobody seemed to know who was expected to do what. For the first time, also educational administrators were expected to adopt completely new roles, becoming consultants supporting the school-based curriculum process. The suspicion and conflicts between teachers and administrators may have arisen from the earlier dualism in the educational policy which more clearly separated administrative duties from the teaching practice.

The curriculum reform has also provided teachers and schools with increased freedom for designing new methods of teaching and learning - although it has to be mentioned that this freedom has existed for years as the Finnish educational system does not involve any national tests in the lower level comprehensive schools. This is manifest in the modes of teaching carried out by one innovative teacher in Mäkilampi School over the past ten years. Also the former inspection system has been ceased with the diminishing role of provincial educational authority. Although the freedom for personal arrangements in teaching is not a recent phenomenon, it has not borne as significant role in official educational policy as it has now. This could possibly encourage teachers to bring changes in their instruction in the future.

One of the underlying motives in the curriculum reform has involved increasing teachers' commitment to the school-based curriculum. The national curriculum did not provide teachers enough support for their teaching practice which is manifest in Atjonen's research (1989; 1993): her study revealed that over half of the teachers seldom opened the thick book called 'National Curriculum'. A new practice of writing school-based curricula is expected to make teachers commit themselves to their own curricula. However, the process of curriculum writing in Mäkilampi School gives conflicting views about this issue. Although the school's official policy required teachers to commit themselves to the commonly agreed principles of teaching, teaching methods varies considerably between teachers inside the school. Also the distribution of lesson hours was different on the paper than in practice. I wonder if the school practice would let us suggest that the Finnish education system is on the way to specialization not only between schools but also inside schools. As the teaching is not controlled by any official bodies, the teachers - as one teacher it expressed - can do whatever they wish to do in their classes!

On the other hand, we may also dig up some less altruistic motives for the educational reform. Starting from the schools, it may be noted that one important motive in Mäkilampi School in joining school development projects has been a need to raise the public profile of the school to struggle against the continuous threats of closures. This fact is manifest in the ways teachers and parents talk about the reputation of the school which has also initiated public discussion in the

local newspaper. If the present situation gives us a preview of the possibly harsh competition between schools in the future is to be seen. The increased competition is a fact even in the administration where posts are continuously being discontinued which may have been one of the motives for the timing of educational reform originated by the National Board of Education. At the time, the reform was launched the debate on the need to diminish the role of this body was a burning issue.

The teachers in this school also expressed their concern for the evaluation carried out inside schools. This fear is real although the official educational policy stresses the role of evaluation as an instrument in the continuous school development. In accordance to the views of teachers, these researchers emphasize the importance of providing schools with feedback on their work which should confidential and not used for increasing competition between schools. The self-evaluation should not become an obligation for schools; instead it should act as an instrument for continuous development of teaching (Lyytinen 1992). The researchers would combine the national evaluation with the self-assessment of schools; the former producing information on general trends in education and the latter providing teachers with knowledge on their work. The researchers would also include parents and students themselves in the evaluation of the school-based curricula (Uusikylä & Kansanen 1988).

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TEACHERS ON A COLLISION COURSE - THE KIDS ARE HAVING THE DAY OFF

A Case Study of the Planning and Implementation of the Curriculum in the Lower Level of a Small Town Comprehensive School in Finland

Seppo Hämäläinen

1 INTRODUCTION

> The process of curriculum planning took more than two years. As long, in fact, as an elephant's pregnancy. It was discussed, almost forgotten and then discussed again. Finally, in one mad rush, everything came together. Because we had taken our time with the preparations, the final result was complete and running smoothly almost immediately. I felt immense pleasure on hearing one of the teachers comment this spring that the final achievement had been a success for each and every one of the people involved.

As he says this, the deputy head glows with pride. He holds in his hands the brand new curriculum of his own lower level comprehensive school, for the first time in the school's history. His happiness is well-deserved as he has, in practice, been the co-ordinator of the planning process.

The gradual shift from a centralized national curriculum to local one has come about as a result of a long process of development in the school. The utilization of the new curricular freedom is meant to be a constant process of learning (cf. Elo 1994; Kimonen & Nevalainen 1995).

This article describes the process of preparing a school curriculum in a provincial Finnish school. It takes the form of a case study and covers the period 1993-1995, looking, in particular, at the written curriculum and its implementation. For the purposes of this paper, we shall call the school Vaara School.

In 1995, Vaara School was divided into four classes with two basic study groups at each level and 184 pupils in total. In addition to the headteacher, there were seven class teachers, three part-time subject teachers, one part-time special teacher, a secretary, a catering manager, and a caretaker. There were four clubs for the pupils in the school, and the school had (and still has) its own board of governors.

2 RESEARCH METHOD

The research material of Vaara School was collected in 1993 and again in 1995. In both years, the period spanning late April to early May was used. During the first phase, the school was visited by two researchers over four days, and during the second phase by one researcher over four days. In spring 1995, the interviews were recorded and transcribed. In November 1995, the interviews were supplemented with telephone interviews and two teachers submitted their own descriptions and evaluations of the implementation of the new school-based written curriculum.

In Vaara School, the school headteachers (in 1993 and 1995), the deputy head (both of them male), and two teachers (both female), the chairperson of the board of governors (father of one pupil), and the mother of one pupil, who participated in the parents' meetings were interviewed for the research. Two of the teachers were observed by shadowing them for the four days.

Research methods consisted of observation, interviews, and document analysis. A list of the required documents was sent to the school in advance. Researchers had access to the working plan for the school year 1992-1993, the new school-based curriculum for 1995-1996, and the annual school newsletters and reports. Researchers also used the municipal education plan. During the class observation, researchers also had access to the schedules, the teacher's personal curricula, study materials and teachers' guides, the pupils' achievements, and the outcome of group projects.

The field research involved a process of continuous observation. In addition to following the lessons, the researchers also attempted to observe as efficiently as possible other activities within the school, for example activities in the staff room and in the school yard during breaks, dining room activity and teachers' meetings. A written record was kept of these observations. At first, observation was as open and free of any preconceptions as possible. However, as the research progressed, observation focussed on subjects which appeared to be characteristic of the school ethos.

The technique employed was a mixture of both guided and open interview. The initial aim was to keep the interviews as free and as close to natural conversation as possible. A further aim was to give an opportunity to the interviewees to raise issues they regarded as important. However, as the study progressed, the researchers developed an interest in certain themes. As a result, the information they wanted to obtain from the interviews became more specific.

This meant that the content of the interviews included discussions on prepared themes as well as the issues raised by the interviewees.

In addition to the actual interviews, many 'free' discussions took place between the principal, the teaching staff, and the pupils. These casual discussions took place, for example, during breaks and lunch hours. Often the free discussions turned out to be richer sources of information than the actual interviews.

According to Webb (1994, 10), the validation of data concerns the processes whereby researchers can both have confidence in their own analyses and can present these in ways which can independently be checked by others. During the field study, the aim of increasing the validity and credibility of the research was confirmed by applying the technique of triangulation which involved the use of numerous methods of data collection (Vulliamy 1990, 161). In this research, three types of triangulation were used: methodological, source, and analyst triangulation (Patton 1990, 464-472). Triangulation between the various methods was utilised in the comparison of collected data taken for example from interviews or periods of observation. Often points which came up in one method area were consciously checked in another. A more detailed account of the methodology of the research can be found in Hämäläinen and Jokela (1993, 21-23).

3 PLANNING OF THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM FOR THE SCHOOL YEARS 1995-1999

3.1 Division of Labour between the Headteacher and the Deputy Head in the Curriculum Planning Process

The deputy head of Vaara School was chosen to help with the curriculum planning according to the recommendation of the then headteacher in spring 1993. The writing and the implementation of the school-based curriculum is at the core of the pedagogical development of the school. The pedagogical leadership has in fact been adopted by the deputy head even if according to the statutes, this is the responsibility of the headteacher.

The headteacher has been very active in the political activities of the municipality and he has also been the head trustee of a trade union. Possibly because of the public relations of the headteacher, the school was given a large grant for the extension and renovation of the building. The construction plans have taken up much of the headteacher's time and so despite the lack of any official division of labour within the school, the tasks of the administrative and the pedagogical leadership were clearly divided.

The teachers interviewed held very positive views about the divided management.

Headteacher: I have attended the curriculum meetings, but I haven't taken an active role. The deputy head has done a lot of work in planning the curriculum. He received a bonus for this work last year, but this year he has given his services for free out of interest in the project.

Deputy head: Two years ago the previous headteacher asked whether I would be willing to take part in the training of support staff, and, as I have done a one week course arranged by the National Board of Education, I agreed. My motivation for doing this work has been interest rather than money. I have had the benefit of free training and the chance to improve my own qualifications. The curriculum planning has been a big part of my life during these two years. It's like normal lesson planning.

Teacher, grade 3: The input of the headteacher in the curriculum development has been very small. He was always busy when we were doing this. We were actually very happy about it, when he was not involved in the work as he is a bit of a nuisance. The deputy head was trained for the job and had found out about it. He knew how to say things, so it was a big help. We knew what to do. He would say "Next we'll do this and then that". It was not too restricted or anything. It was really good.

Teacher, grade 1: The headteacher is good at politics. He is on good terms with influential people, he knows plenty of people. He can influence the extension work and the improvements to the school. The deputy head has been trained for two years by the school inspector. The deputy head brought new suggestions along to the school. The curriculum work started with this discussion of values two years ago.

3.2 Planning Process

The process of planning the curriculum started in autumn 1993. As described above, the current deputy head of the school was chosen as the co-ordinator of the planning process. He had participated in the one-week training seminar on school-based curricula arranged by the National Board of Education in the early spring. There was a training course for co-ordinators of the school-based curriculum work in the province of this case-study school, starting in autumn 1993 and continuing until the end of year 1995 as well. The school inspector of the province was a tutor on this course. Only one teacher from the case-study participated on this course whereas other schools sent several representatives. The training course was attended by approximately 30 teachers.

Deputy head: The study was based on the process of group work, and its success depended on the activity of the participants. The course took a communicative approach and was a very positive experience. There were many discussions, group work, more discussions, debating and construction. Some may say that a discussion which takes six hours is not productive but there were positive results even if only the demonstration of the dedication of the participants.

The course for the support staff met every six weeks for six hours at a time. Every meeting ended with an exercise, the topic of which would be agreed on by the group. Every support person did this exercise with the teachers in the schools during the intervening weeks. At the next meeting, the outcome would be presented, analysed, and discussed. The deputy head of Vaara School used the

same creative methods in his role as a co-ordinator as were used on the course, for example, in the use of double teams and group processing.

According to the deputy head's interview, there had been curriculum meetings of one-to-three-hours in the schools for two years, at least once a month after school hours but every second week in the spring semester 1995. There were frequent discussions on the curriculum during the Teachers' Planning Meeting every Monday. During the first year, all the teaching staff attended the meeting as one group. Then the values of the school and the background ideas of the general meeting with the parents in order to discuss these values. The teachers had collected a lot of statements on values, and, from these the parents chose the ones they considered important. According to teachers interviewed, the opinions of the parents followed the same lines. The basic ethos of the school was agreed on by the parents and the teachers. This is later presented in the report.

3.3 Teachers' Experience of the Planning Process

As we can see in the following interviews, the co-ordinator regards it as necessary to have the background discussion during the first year in order to understand the present situation. The other teachers were more reserved during the first year and at the beginning of the second. They felt that the discussions were a waste of time. There were no written agreements or curriculum changes during the first year.

At the beginning of the year 1995, the work was carried out in small groups. For the meeting every group prepared their comments or presentation of the area of development agreed on. The presentations were discussed and they were modified to the extent where every teacher felt they could work in their own personal way according to the curriculum. Every item of the curriculum was dealt within the group. The matters under discussion were the underlying values of the school, the background to the distribution of lesson hours and the educational ethos, the implementation of this distribution in every grade, the aims and the course content of the subjects, integrated theme units or 'theme weeks' in the school, special education, evaluation, pastoral care, and the self-evaluation of the school. The preparation work carried out in small group was considered successful especially in the decision of the aims and the contents of the subjects.

Every one of the four interviewees felt that curriculum work was very difficult, but that it had increased co-operation amongst the teaching staff. They are now satisfied with the written curriculum. They feel it to be their own. Everybody has contributed to it, and they are ready to implement it.

In the following part of the chapter, the experiences and feelings of the four interviewees during the curriculum planning are described further. The extracts are chosen by the researcher to represent the interviewee's main opinion of the planning process. It is worth remarking that the teachers did not analyse their experiences, but described in concrete terms their opinions on certain topics.

Interviewer: What do you think about the planning process? How did you solve the disagreements? How did you reach consensus in a group this big?

Deputy head: Then again, these discussions about the curriculum were based on disagreements and opinions of different people. We have been using a kind of group strategy, and the result is really a compromise where the sum is greater than its parts. For example, we have been working in double teams and small groups. We have a brainstorming session and then a discussion. We choose a topic and discuss it and then a kind of common opinion develops. This becomes an umbrella term agreed by everyone and so we can set it down in black and white. One of the teachers said that this spring, when we had struggled through the final phase of discussion, it felt as if the result had been achieved by every one of us. We were unrealistic in 1993 when we thought that after a 2 hour meeting we would be ready to go off and write our curriculum. That curriculum would not have been our own. However, we needed the long period of preparation. There were changes in the teaching staff that year, but, in my opinion, that didn't affect the work because we had a solid base to build on. As a result of the initial preparation, the work was already in progress and so the new teachers were able to get on with it pretty well.

When you evaluate this curriculum, when a consensus is sought, is it going to be so general that the ideas will have become stale?

Deputy head: No, or rather, yes, to some extent. But let us take any one of these values, for example, our main goal of 'skills and happiness at school'. We've been pondering over it for hours, even weeks, and getting more and more involved with the subject. Whereas previously it would only have been a general idea, we have now assimilated it to the extent where it has become a part of our thought process.

To give just one example; Co-operation skills will be strengthened by practising the social skills needed during the normal activities of a school day. This 'guideline' is mere hot air. It needs to be taken seriously. It needs our commitment, and that commitment means more than just writing it down. It has to be considered carefully and after that the tools for its implementation have to be constructed. Any outsider reading this would consider it mere 'officialese', but the reality is so much more than that.

Teacher, grade 1: The curriculum has always been really important to me, at the start of every school year I look at the curriculum and check the goals of the year in each subject. I use these goals as the basis for discussion in parents' meetings. They have been a kind of framework to work with. We have also had these national goals, which we amended locally, in 1986 if I remember correctly. And the local issues were considered. They have always been really important to me. They have provided guidelines to work with. It is easy to lean on these, you know what you should get across during this year. And if a pupil has difficulties with something, I have known that these are the goals to get to, and then brought along the kind of exercises that would help in getting there.

When we started the planning of this new curriculum, at first, we felt it was unnecessary. The old curriculum was good, so why waste time writing a new one. Then I thought about teachers who considered that the curriculum was not important. Maybe it was too abstract for them to be used annually as a matter of course. And for myself, there are benefits from group discussions, discussions on values and new insights into things. And practising the same things again, but new things come up, new opinions. In that sense it is really good.

But then we started working on the new contents and deciding on goals. Somehow the old objectives felt so right that one could not reject them, start things all over again. We took those as fundamental. We were working on those things that we felt were important. The less important ones were left out, some new taken in. The new syllabus is very much based

on the old one. I am satisfied with the outcome. It was a lot of work, but now it feels like my own.

Teacher, grade 3: Had I been working alone, I might not have had there such good ideas in planning this. For example, when we were thinking about it in small groups, deciding on the syllabus content for the third, fourth grade, many new ideas were generated during our discussions. Maybe if I had done the writing on my own, it would have been easier, but it wouldn't have been the same, the richness of discussion would be missing.

The construction of the school-based curriculum for Vaara School is considered a success. The written curriculum was the result of the two-year discussion amongst the teaching staff. The teachers seemed to appreciate the more communicative relationship that was developed among them during the process. Consensus was seemingly reached by not trying to fuse the different truths into one, the curriculum provides the teachers with a functional framework, but the goals and the subject contents are open to interpretation, and the teachers are entitled to choose their own methods, provided they have already been approved. The change in the pedagogical traditions of the school which support the teacher as an individual is not an aim in itself. The teachers now seem to have a greater awareness of the functioning of the school as a whole, as a result of the planning process.

Deputy head: Generally, it can be said that a communicative approach to learning has been adopted. This approach has provided us with a structure on which to build, at the same time, maintaining the best of the traditions and rejecting those that have proved to be no longer of use. We have tried this approach in the meetings with teachers and we are trying to make it work in schools as well. In our opinion, we have all been working hard in this school even though some of us were initially sceptical. Having worked together and begun to generate new ideas, we found that the negative opinions began to change. The approach we have taken is based on the assumption that everyone has the potential to be creative. For me, at least, this was very positive. We were proud of our accomplishment, we have developed a common bond during the process, and, in this way used our own creative potential to bring this about.

Both the younger members of staff and the older experienced teachers have different sets of abilities and strengths to offer. We have been striving to build the school program in such a way that it ensures that everyone can utilise their skills. This program aims to develop self-confidence and provide an environment which encourages teachers to appreciate the skills of their colleagues. In this way, the strengths and abilities of the staff will become an important asset for the school and the children.

4 THE WRITTEN CURRICULUM

The written curriculum of Vaara School is a compact document of approximately 22 pages. In the following, the original background of the curriculum is presented, and from the many subjects the goals and syllabus contents of Finnish and Mathematics are described according to the curriculum.

4.1 Underlying Values

Value statement: basic skills and happiness at school
Educational idea:

- Learning to work includes practising methods and skills that are profound and of high quality.
- Co-operation skills are strengthened through practice of everyday skills.
- A positive atmosphere is created and maintained by learning to appreciate others and taking their wishes into consideration.
- Independent thinking involves making choices and taking responsibility for those choices in the process of achieving a mutual goal.

Happiness at school is the basis of the work ethos of the class.

4.2 Background for the Allocation of Lesson Hours and the Pedagogical Ethos

The aim of the timetabling of lesson hours is to help in the implementation of integrated teaching. Additionally, with the workshops the special skills of the teachers can be exploited and the pupils can be offered as wide-ranging learning experiences as possible.

A further aim of the system of timetabling is to give the teachers more opportunity to teach in the way they prefer provided that the mutually agreed goals are attained.

The pedagogical ethos allows for the opportunity to divide teaching in three parts: core subject study periods, project work periods (= integrated/cross-curricular teaching), and workshops.

Core subject study periods can be one or two weeks in length. During these periods, pupils are intensively instructed in the core subjects, Finnish, and Mathematics.

The workshops allow the pupils to develop their skills in the fields of Music, Handicraft, Sports, Languages (English), and Performing Arts.

4.3 The Implementation of the Timetabling Each Grade

4.3.1 Grades 1 and 2, Beginners

In the first two grades, the subject contents of the subjects are in the process of being integrated into functional learning units.

Workshops are arranged for the first grade pupils in the spring term (total 2). Participation in these is voluntary. For the second graders, there will be workshops both in autumn and spring terms (total 4). These are also voluntary .

4.3.2 Grades 3 and 4

It is possible in the third and fourth grade that teaching will be divided into study periods of three weeks, consisting of two weeks of instruction in the core subjects and one week of project work. Participation in the workshops is voluntary. In addition to this, there are two weekly lessons in Handicrafts and Arts, decided on a yearly basis.

4.4 Distribution of Lesson Hours/Week

	GRADES				
	1.	2.	3.	4.	TOTAL
Finnish	8	8	5	5	26
English	-	-	2	2	4
Mathematics	4	4	4	4	16
Biology/Geography/Environmental Science	1.5	1.5	1	1	11
Religion/Moral Education	1.5	1.5	1	1	5
History	-	-	-	-	-
Music	1	1	1*	1*	6
Visual Arts	2	2	1*	1*	6
Handicraft	1	1	2*	2*	6
PE	1	1	2*	2*	6
Subjects decided on a yearly basis			+2*	+2*	
Voluntary workshop from the spring term of the first year onwards					
Workshops (named in the working plan)	20	20	24	24	

4.5 Subject Entities

4.5.1 Subject Goals and Syllabus Content (Finnish and Mathematics as Examples)

Finnish, grades 1-2
Goals:
Skills in reading, writing, and communication

Subject contents:

- ability to read a text consisting of a couple of sentences
- ability to answer questions on the contents of a text through correct reading and understanding
- writing skills: correct choice of upper or lower case letter, legible handwriting
- writing from dictation words of one or two syllables, easy three syllable words, and sentences of two words
- independent writing of a story of several sentences
- providing captions for a picture
- concentration on listening; 'living' a story
- development of verbal expression
- development of interest in books and reading.

Mathematics, grades 3-4

Goals:

The general goal of Mathematics is to give the pupil practice in perception and to encourage the pupil to present things accurately.

Contents:

- strengthening basic arithmetic skills
- multiplication tables
- units of measurement and conversion
- two-dimensional figures and angles
- introduction to fractions, decimals, and negative figures
- drawing up tables, and diagrams.

As we can see from these examples, the curriculum provides a loose framework for the goals, contents, and methods. It is worth noting that the curriculum pays attention to project work, as well as encouraging it by devoting a period approximately every third week to Humanities and Natural Sciences and Handicraft. Provision is also made for differences of interest in the two lessons a week given to Visual Arts.

New Ideas in the Curriculum:

1) In the grades 1-2 the focus is on Finnish and Mathematics, in the grades 3-4 this shifts to humanities and natural sciences (Biology, Geography, and Environmental Science),

2) Workshops have been set up in which teachers provide pupils the opportunity to develop their basic skills in various fields of general knowledge according to the teachers' special interests,

3) Topics in handicraft skills and arts are decided on yearly basis, in which the pupils can choose two weekly lessons from four different subjects.

5 THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WRITTEN CURRICULUM

The National Board of Education (1994) has encouraged the schools to find their own profiles in the curriculum planning process. The focus can be on the needs of the municipality (for example, in communities interested in ecological issues or in biodynamic farm products), on the teachers' special skills or interests (international education, art education) or on the skills of the children (sports, music). According to the education department of the province, many schools have actually focussed on their strengths, and this has increased their enthusiasm for the new curriculum.

The teachers and the parents of Vaara School have jointly decided that the school should teach basic skills. This should include not only the basics of Reading, Writing, Mathematics, or any particular subject, but also improvements in the skills of working, co-operation, as well as a shared responsibility for providing a positive atmosphere, independent thinking and joy in work. This chapter will give examples and descriptions of the concrete measures taken in order to reach these aims.

5.1 Project Work in Grade 3

During the observation period in spring 1995, pupils of the third grade were working on a project based on the coming of the spring in Southern Finland. The general aim of the project was to develop skills of analytical observation and measurement of nature. A further aim was to learn to report or describe the observations both scientifically and artistically. The teacher regarded the choice of topic as very suitable for the above aims as the changes in spring time are very rapid, but recognisable even during a short two-week period. The rapidity of changes would motivate pupils in the tasks of measuring and observation.

The pupils were divided into four groups of their own choosing. Each group was given a special focus of observation, these were; the weather, plants, animals, and people. The tasks were discussed with the teacher, and each of the groups had their own daily tasks of observation. These tasks consisted of measuring temperatures, rainfall, wind direction and force, observation of the development of buds, leaves, and flowers of different plant species, migratory birds and nesting birds, observation of the work in garden, and interviews with farmers about their work in the spring. In addition, the groups added some more tasks of their own choosing, for example the comparisons of the accuracy of the weather reports in the newspapers, interviews with the cleaning staff on very muddy days, and the use of cycling helmets.

Each group was responsible for its own division of labour. Normally, the observations were made daily in pairs. The large tables and diagrams on the classroom walls were updated daily. The pupils practised their computing skills, especially text-processing, in connection with the reporting. Some nature trips were made together with the class. Many observations were made at home in the morning and evening and during the weekends.

Music and Arts were linked closely to the project work according to the teacher. All the displays on the classroom walls demonstrated this: the project work was decorated with collages of people in boats and spring flowers. The lesson time reserved for the teaching of Mathematics, English, Sports, and Handicrafts was excluded from the project. During our observation period, the reporting and feedback of project work was under supervision on a daily basis, so there was no grand exhibition of the project at the end. However, the presentation of the final work took nearly three lessons. The groups were instructed to present their achievement in such a way that every pupil was involved. The presentations of each group were evaluated. According to the teacher's instructions, pupils paid attention to the clarity and informativeness of the project work displays on the walls and the quality of the presentations.

The reporting of the groups was under strict supervision. The teacher asked further questions and also elicited comments from other pupils. As the skills of reading newspaper weather maps and text-processing were considered as special goals of this project, a lot of attention was paid to those. The teacher asked every pupil for an interpretation of the weather maps. Short articles written by everyone in the class were displayed and then evaluated through asking questions such as "What is good?" and "What could be re-edited?" The length of the articles varied from a couple of lines to stories more than half a page long. The teacher had corrected the punctuation, but had done nothing else in the writing process.

All pupils liked the observation tasks. Many of them mentioned parental guidance and help. According to the teacher, more interest was shown in those tasks not based on reading. This was the case because the level of reading skills of the pupils is varied, and those pupils who read more slowly are often frustrated by the reading tasks and lack the motivation for book research.

5.2 Class Teaching in Grade 1

In spring 1995, the class work of grade 1 and its teacher was the same as in 1993. The pupils were instructed for 16 lessons a week with the whole group of 22 pupils. Only half of the class attended 2 lessons of Finnish, one lesson of Mathematics and one of Handicraft at a time. Once a week there was a regular remedial lesson, usually Finnish, for 2 to 4 pupils. In addition to this, the teacher taught the two Russian speaking pupils for three remedial Finnish lessons a week. When they had a working knowledge of Finnish, they would receive instruction in Russian, their native language. They have this right according to the Basic Education Act in Finland.

The teacher used two thirds of the lesson time for whole class teaching. For one third of the time, the pupils practised on their own according to their level of skill. Small scale pair or group work was sometimes included in the lessons. Larger project work needed longer, for example, a week was spent on topics of seasons and national holidays. The instruction in Finnish and Mathematics was normally kept separate. According to the teacher, the basic skills in the grade 1 teaching are best acquired when taught as single units, such as the alphabet,

syllables, sentence structure as well as numbers and operations in arithmetic. Fairy tales, stories, and anecdotes are naturally incorporated into the teaching.

The weekly schedule of the teacher was planned around 45 -minute lessons, and almost without exception breaks were held between formal lessons even if the work continued on the same topic after the break. In order to avoid confusion and yet keep the school week flexible, the pupils and parents were given a timetable with only the times for starting in the morning and finishing in the afternoon for each pupil. Only the exact time for the PE lesson was marked in the timetable so that pupils would know when to bring their sports equipment to school. The working plan is not based on themes, but topics.

Because the teacher used a lot of whole class teaching and the chosen text book material, the lesson followed the plan set out in the teacher's guide. A 130-word text in the book was called "That's not true". It was about a game in which the narrator described a place or an event adding some erroneous details into the story. When any one of pupils spotted a mistake, s/he was to shout "That's not true".

The teacher gave as an aim of the lesson to develop the skills of understanding and induce meaning in reading and listening comprehension. The workbook material demands visual perception. New vocabulary relevant to domestic animals will be introduced. Further exercises will be done on four letter syllables and the ng-phoneme.

The topic was discussed over two days, 45 minutes each day. The first of these lessons was for half groups, that is, 11 pupils were instructed from 8 am to 9 am and the second half of the class from 12 am to 1 pm. The second lesson was for the whole group on the next day. During the split classes, the pupils are in groups of homogenous reading skills, but, otherwise the groups are of mixed ability.

Even the pupils with good reading skills were happy to be in the whole group with slower readers and they did not want to read or work individually during that time. According to the teacher, the exercises were so interesting that even the most able readers would be challenged. At the same time, they would learn social and presentation skills in the group and they would be able to act as models and as encouragement for the less able. Not even the most talented reader would miss the class teaching. According to the teacher, there is enough time for made-to-measure tasks during the school day. These tasks are also given as homework. Carrying out these tasks is described elsewhere in this paper.

Lesson plan

1. Lesson:

1. Reading aloud with expression (15 minutes)

Each pupil read a bit of the text. Pupils evaluated each other's reading. Peer evaluation was remarkable in the sense that differentiated results were expected of able and less able pupils.

2. Listening practice (19 minutes)
The teacher dictated the sentences very slowly so pupils had to remember one word for some time and finally grasp the whole sentence. The teacher read 10 sentences and asked whether the statements were true or false. The pupils had to argue in support of their views on the truth value. For example: "I am now outdoors and indoors". "A chicken is smaller than a cow, but it is bigger than a sheep and a cat."

3. Practice on alphabet (10 minutes)
The pupils recited the alphabet (sometimes helped by the teacher). The others listened closely to hear if any letter of the alphabet was missing, misplaced, or doubled.

4. Discussion (10 minutes)
The pupils were shown a text and a picture about caring for domestic animals. First, the teacher asked questions about the message of the text and the picture, also detailed questions. The names of young animals were rehearsed. Finally, the pupils were asked to tell the class about their experiences on domestic animals they had seen and cared for. The teacher asked for elaboration in the answers on care and the usefulness of domestic animals.

All pupils seemed to be enthusiastic about contributing to the lesson by putting up their hands, looking at the teacher and giving answers. The answers were given in good order, there was no shouting aloud (except during the "That's not true" exercise). All pupils in each group were given a turn to speak. Both the teacher and the pupils concentrated on the speaker and the teacher concluded each presentation with the help of additional questions in a friendly and pleasant manner finding something to praise in each answer.

2. Lesson:
All 22 pupils were together in the room. The topic introduced the previous day was continued.

Explanation (10 minutes)
The teacher began by giving some information about herself. When the pupils heard something they considered false, they shouted "That's not true!" Then the pupils gathered in groups of five to six and took turns in describing their classmates' looks, clothes etc. and made deliberate mistakes so that the others could point them out.

Improvisation (10 minutes)
Everyone sat in a big circle. The blindfolded pupil in the middle pointed at another pupil in random and named an animal. The 'appointed' was to imitate the sounds that the animal makes. If the blindfolded pupil guessed who had made the sounds, the imitator was then to take his/her place.

Listening to ng-phoneme and exercise on the board (15 minutes)
The /ng/-phoneme is one of the few Finnish phonemes that is not phonetically written. The teacher dictated 30 words and pupils repeated them aloud syllable by syllable. If the pupil heard one occurrence of the ng-phoneme, s/he was to put up one hand, if two, two hands. If s/he did not hear even one, the hands were down. Finally, the words on the blackboard, some of them were spelled correctly, some of them not. Each pupil could read out whichever word they wanted and then either come out and tick the correct spelling or correct the faulty one. The pupils seemed to pick the words according to their own abilities.

Dictation (5 minutes)
The teacher read out 5 words containing either of the occurrences of the phoneme and pupils wrote them down. The teacher seemed to use this exercise as a diagnostic test. If there was any need for more practice in this, the teacher would give remedial lessons to distinguish the ng-phoneme in listening and writing.

Reading by the teacher (5 minutes)
At the end of the lesson, the teacher read two poems about animals. The poems were not analysed nor discussed. The poems provided an aesthetic experience of the close of the lesson. (See Hämäläinen & Jokela 1993, 71-84.)

5.3 A General Evaluation of the Implementation

In November 1995, the outcome of the school curriculum implementation was evaluated on the basis of interview with the two teachers and the headteacher which was later supplemented by a telephone interview. Both teachers submitted their own written evaluation (4-5 pages) of the implemented curriculum as requested.

Both of the teachers were now teaching the grades 1 and 2, the older teacher was teaching grade 2 and the younger grade 1. Both felt the new class curriculum had been a success. They considered the increase of the lesson time in Finnish (8 lessons per week) and in Mathematics (4 weekly lessons) an advantage. Approximately 60 per cent of the time was dedicated to these two subjects. The increased teaching and learning time and the concentration on basic skills allows the school to achieve its aim of 'basic skills and happiness at school'. The happiness is realized through slow steady progress and the joy of achievement. The 'automatic' basic skills in Finnish and Mathematics are acquired by combining the aspects of meaningful and reception learning (cf. Ausubel in Lahdes 1985).

The pupils have to master one thing before they are introduced to another. Both teachers think that these aims and pupil-centered teaching are reached by differentiation of teaching. The older of the teachers favoured the less controlled method of planning so that the aims and achievements are not logged for every single lesson. This flexibility allowed her to have, for example, one whole day dedicated to teaching of Finnish or Mathematics. It was remarkable in the

evaluation by the younger teacher that the text books and the teacher's guides were so highly thought of, and that her teaching was so closely linked to these. "The teacher's guide is like the Bible," she commented.

The younger of the teachers described the sharing of the experiences and ideas of the implementation of the curriculum daily with the teacher of the parallel class. Both of the teachers taught their own classes, there was no group instruction for grade 1 in its entirety. The younger of the teachers was in charge of music education in the school as she had specialised in it during her training. So during these lessons, some other teacher instructed her class in Religion or in Environmental Science. There are also teachers of PE and of Languages in this school. Many of the teachers teach their special subject to several classes/grades. Thus the teachers' individual skills are best exploited for the benefit of the school. One example is that the headteacher gives instruction in Technical Handicraft to the whole school.

The workshops were meant to start in grade 2. At the moment, they are limited to grade 4. For these workshops, both classes of grade 4 are divided into two groups of 12 to 14 pupils. The group has one lesson a week in workshops. The focus of the workshops is on education in science. At the time of our observation period, the phenomenon of thermal expansion was approached from the problem solving point of view. Pupils' observations of nature or simplified models and demonstrations were prominent according to the principles of discovery learning. The pupils drew a report on the basis of observation. The experimental workshop was supervised by two of the teachers and the headteacher. According to the two teachers and the headteacher, the value of the workshop experiment was diminished by the facts that - there was not enough funding for the materials needed,

- no teachers were interested in teaching more than the legally required number of lessons
- there was no funding for hiring expert teachers from outside the school
- there were difficulties in drawing up the class timetable.

Both of the teachers commented on the headteacher's inability to draw up the lesson plan before the beginning of the autumn term. Even after its overdue completion, there were some practical difficulties according to the teachers. The workshop lessons and the combined lessons for multiple grades and the shared facilities of the school would have required more organised management.

The options of the Art and Handicraft subjects (two weekly lessons) were fully implemented in quantity, but they lost something in quality. According to the plans in the spring the optional courses were planned to take place at the same time as periodical theme units, for example, from 1 to 2 pm or from 1 to 3 pm. In the lesson timetable drawn up by the headteacher, these lessons were scattered around different days and took place early in the morning or late in the afternoon. The choices of many pupils were influenced more by the timetable than by the course content; the early morning lessons did not attract the pupils. It seems that the consensus on choice was not broad enough in the school. The teachers were no longer interested in the plan in the autumn. The pupils felt the lessons were similar to the previous ones. "There was no course on how to play

kantele (a traditional Finnish harp), nor a course on stepdance as we were promised last spring." The teachers agreed that the lesson plan would have to be modified next year so that all the optional courses would take place at the same time in the weekly schedule and the content descriptions of the courses announced to the pupils for a basis of choices to be made.

The curriculum was only partly successful in terms of workshop and optional course planning, but, in my opinion, it was successful to a greater degree in other areas of planning. As a matter of fact, no great changes were expected in other subjects. According to my interpretation, the promotion of the deputy head, the key person in the curriculum planning, to the post of the headteacher of the neighbouring school, and the pseudoinvolvement of the headteacher in the planning process resulted in some crucial discrepancies in the implementation of the written curriculum, e.g. the decisions involving the school as a whole (teacher co-operation or division of labour, timetables, facilities, funding, materials etc.). The co-operation of the teaching staff and the headteacher seems to have been unsuccessful in this respect. In a Finnish school, the curriculum has often been regarded as a 'status quo' and constant changes have undermined teachers' confidence (Syrjäläinen 1994). The youngest of the teachers interviewed seems to view the curriculum as a process to be worked on constantly: "Next we will take on the evaluation and, consequently, the development of school certificate forms. As soon as we can get all of the teachers interested in changing things, the planning processes of this school will yield positive results."

6 EVALUATION OF RESULTS

Four key areas of observation and interpretation were focussed on in this case study of curriculum change in Vaara School. The first of these involved the setting of targets for the written curriculum; the presentation of content and the structure of the plan were interpreted as an attempt to merge two approaches to teaching, one of learning management (behaviourist), the second centring on the learning environment (constructivist). In the second place, this attempt to create the school's own curriculum can be interpreted as partly a consequence of solidarity towards changes in teachers' careers. Thirdly, the management of change and the authority exercised in the process were seen to display both communicative and strategic features which were both explained in the course of the study. Finally, it was evident that teachers interpreted the long and creative planning process carried out by the staff in different ways. In particular, the potential for learning new professional skills was only partly understood and appreciated.

6.1 Attempt to Merge Two Approaches to Teaching

There is no doubt that Vaara School written curriculum was a document which complied with the rules laid out by the National Framework Curriculum. Traditional teachers tended to view it in terms of subject teaching and planned the

teaching as learning-management. Glaser and Bassock (1989) have divided approaches to teaching into two types, one based on learning-management (behaviourist) and the other on learning environment (constructivist). Rauste-von Wright and von Wright (1995, 133) consider teaching and planning of teaching as learning-management when the teacher provides the direction for learning and takes responsibility for ensuring that such a course is followed. This is based on the assumption that learners attempt to complete tasks which are set.

The teachers in the school in this study have achieved excellent results with the learning-management type of teaching in core subjects in recent years. The students learned to understand and apply the basic concepts well (Hämäläinen & Jokela 1993, 71-84). Teachers who were settled in their careers wanted to hold on to their professional identities. Their behaviour in changing circumstances was similar to the attitudes observed by Webb et al. (1997) in schools elsewhere in Finland and in the world: "Primary teachers' self identities are powerful mediators in terms of their interpretations of and responses to, imposed changes".

The Framework Curriculum begins by identifying the school targets according to the demands of contemporary society and then goes on to encourage individual schools to plan teaching based on learning environments. Schools are offered the possibility of constructing an entire curriculum based on providing pupils with problems to solve and the means to solve them along with the guidance and support necessary. The underlying assumption is that the individual attempts to understand the world by looking for causes and explanations (Rauste-von Wright & von Wright 1995, 133). This part of the framework appeared to be especially appropriate for teachers at the beginning of their teaching careers in Vaara School.

The most extensive part of the document is the subject-based element of the curriculum. It lists the goals and content of each subject. These were established after long discussions and represented a set of compromises which were presented at such a general level that everyone could commit to them. All the teachers saw the assignment of different weighting as a good solution. Previous practice was modified to include more lessons in Finnish and Mathematics for grades 1 and 2, with fewer lessons for grades 3 and 4. Instead, for upper grades, there were more lessons on environmental and community issues. The main argument for this was that project work and assignments involving problem solving and independent work in general were carried out with better results if the skills of reading and writing as well as mathematical thinking were more advanced.

The majority of teachers felt that teaching approaches should not be mentioned in the written curriculum as these were seen to be overly restrictive. Lesson observation showed that most of the teaching was traditionally teacher-centred and divided into lessons. In order to make school work more experimental and pupil-centred, the written curriculum should focus on the teaching process (Norris et al. 1996, 60). In the interview, however, the teachers stressed that according to the curriculum, two thirds of the time was to be dedicated to traditional class teaching and only one third to integrated study of several subjects, which often included project work involving individual and teamwork.

The weighted plan to offer pupils optional workshops and lessons in Arts and subjects involving different skills represented the procedural and child oriented approach to the planning of teaching. According to Rauste-von Wright and von Wright (1995), this view of the learning environment implies constructivist aspects of learning while teaching based on management implies empirical and behaviorist aspects of learning. The curriculum based on behaviourist teaching appeared to be easier to implement than the environmental and child oriented curriculum. At the end of the research period, it became evident that only one workshop for natural science studies was actually held. In this case, the work appeared to be based on problem solving and received an enthusiastic response form the pupils. A number of reasons were given for the failure of other workshops to materialise, these were a lack of funds, timidity of teachers to take challenges in practice, timetable clashes, and disguised acts of authority by the headteacher. Optional lessons in art, for example, failed to take place due to clashes on the timetable. In addition, hardly anyone chose lessons that were scheduled in the early morning.

Vaara School did not succeed in its attempt to merge two approaches to teaching. Perhaps such a change has a better chance of success when implemented in schools where the written curriculum is drawn totally from the learning environment based approach (cf. Kimonen & Nevalainen 1995).

6.2 Teachers at Different Stages on Their Careers: Agreement on Curriculum Change Based on Consensus or Compromise?

The teachers in this study represented a cross section of the teaching population with teachers at different stages of their careers. The deputy head and the more senior teachers in the school felt that the younger teachers had been able to find a niche among the teaching staff. Both in their professional development interviews and their teaching, these teachers were seen to be active in putting forward ideas and also undertaking the teaching of optional courses. They did not admit to suffering from any shock in transferring from student life to their teaching careers, nor did they classify the entry stage of their career as a 'survival course' as implied by several studies (Niemi 1995, 9). Their experience would appear to be more in line with Huberman's notions of 'discovery and enthusiasm' (1992, 123). The young teachers concerned were enthusiastic about their pupils and also regarded themselves and the rest of the teaching staff as equals.

The key question, however, is why the younger teachers were reluctant to take an even more active role in changing the curriculum. This is a significant issue given that it is generally felt that younger teachers act as agents for change in the school (Fullan 1994, 158). One possible explanation for this is that teacher education has not been able to provide the professional skills necessary to promote active change. Well into the 1990's, the didactic and pedagogical courses included into the Finnish teacher education were based on authority. And, according to teacher trainees, little active learning took place (Niemi 1995). Teacher education is a resource which can promote in the school according to the demands of the community. Fullan claims that, in Finland, as in other countries,

this resource has been poorly employed (1994, 152). The current structure of courses offered by Teacher Education Centres appear to support the framework of neo-professionalism and active learning in a much more positive way (Niemi & Kohonen 1995).

The teachers in this study appeared to respect the views and opinions of their colleagues regardless of how many years they had spent in the profession. However, teachers' professional development can take different paths according to Huberman (1992). He gives two extremes of the career paths from early stages to retirement: A) career entry: early years of discovery and initial enthusiasm - stability - experimentation and activism - serenity/relational distance - disengagement/serenity; B) survival: reality shock - stability - reassessment and self doubt - conservatism, tendency to complain - disengagement/bitterness. Shifts between these two extreme paths can occur in different phases of careers, especially when triggered by changes in school circumstances.

The curriculum change implemented by Vaara School was carried out so that everyone would preserve their professional identities, especially if they were to retire during the process. The planning manager stated that, "We carried out the business of planning all together here so that everyone would be happy with the results". It is significant that teachers resigning at any stage of their careers is unheard of in Finland - unlike in England. (Woods 1995).

Young teachers admitted in the interviews that they could use child-oriented teaching methods in the classroom, even if not specifically mentioned in the written curriculum. However, they felt that they did not get enough support when they tried to include these methods in planning school activities. According to research carried out in Switzerland, teachers who experimented with new methods within their own classroom were more satisfied than those who were involved in extensive development projects involving the whole school, or whole school district. (Huberman 1992, 123-139; Niemi 1995, 10).

The teachers who were happiest about their work at Vaara School can be classified (using a phrase which was used in the Swiss case mentioned above) as - "Those sewing on little patches". Teachers in Vaara School were typically working alone, isolated, with their own methods and materials. Teaching activity was seen as a form of handicraft by many of the teachers, and, as mentioned earlier, this influences their interpretations of the national development policy in their own school (Vulliamy et al.1997). The teachers in Vaara School also respected the professional expertise of their colleagues when making decisions and were able to reach compromises as a result of communicative teamwork (cf. Norris 1996, 14).

6.3 Communicative and Strategic Change Management

As the first changes in the curriculum were being made, a new headteacher took over at Vaara School. Prior to this, it had been agreed that the deputy head would be responsible for overseeing the curriculum changes. All the teachers who took part in the interviews agreed he was the most suitable candidate to take on this responsibility. He was personally committed to taking part in the long period of

training. He was reform-minded - as one of the teachers put it - and indeed many had hoped he would be offered the position of headteacher.

However, the local authorities chose as the new headteacher a candidate also previously employed as a teacher at Vaara School. The new headteacher subsequently asked the deputy head to continue the planning process together with the teaching staff.

The headteacher became the decision maker in the execution of the curriculum changes in addition to controlling the allocation of funds. The teaching staff saw the activities of the headteacher and the deputy head as separate and distinct, but with a common aim: change. To quote Habermas (1981, 446), "the actions of the headteacher were strategic, whereas those of the deputy head were communicative".

The deputy head describes the means of planning as communicative. He participated in a training course provided by the provincial authority of professional development, in which planning managers of all schools were taught the same principles. Such courses in professional development are seen as an important agent of change in many areas (Syrjäläinen 1994, 108).

During the two year planning process, the teachers endeavoured to work together and make decisions as equals by achieving a consensus. They themselves considered their methods to be communicative. Each teacher would give their own ideas and opinions and each would be listened to. Discussion would follow and modifications would be made provided there was general agreement. Thus, decisions were based on critical discussions, not on arguments (see also Sarja 1995). The written curriculum was tailor-made for the school. All teaching staff were committed to it.

The headteacher used his authority in carrying out strategic actions. He used both open and hidden strategies, as in Habermas. His open strategies were evident, for instance, in his choices of teaching staff. Hidden strategies were employed in the implementation of the written curriculum in terms of decisions over resources and timetabling. Hidden strategies can be further divided into those which may be regarded as unconscious and those we may consider as conscious. One example of a conscious hidden strategy can be seen in the headteacher's failure to communicate to the teaching staff his realisation during the planning phase that planned stages could not be implemented. Unconscious hidden strategy can be implied by the shortage of managerial and professional skills required for change that the headteacher did not address. Failure to support co-operative decision-making and timetabling to allow for constructivist learning environments are examples of this. Communication was distorted systematically (see also Latomaa 1994).

6.4 The Challenge of Developing New Professional Skills and Co-operation between Teachers and Pupils

Several classifications of teachers' attitudes towards curriculum change exist. Osborn et al. (1992, 148) grouped the reactions of British teachers on four levels; co-operation, retreatism, resistance, and incorporation. Woods (1995) identified

five categories of reaction: resistance, appropriation, resourcing, enrichment, and re-routing. The variation displayed in Finnish schools was described by Norris et al. (1996, 36): schools that were non-starters, false starters, slow starters, up-and-running, and there-or-thereabouts.

Vaara School could be classified as a slow starter suffering from initial cramps although these did not impede it from getting a reasonable start. Some of the teachers could be placed on the level of 'incorporation' because they were willing to accept the change although they were not ready to comply fully with the new perception of learning as seen by the Framework Document. Some of the sub-strategies of the teachers can be seen as 'appropriation', with the planning of teaching activities when carried out co-operatively with the pupils as 'enrichment' (see Webb et al. 1997, 106).

New thinking and new professional skills within the school community are required in the writing of the new curriculum and its implementation. Niemi (1995, 439) has depicted these as elements of commitment, interaction, autonomy, and active learning, all of which are in constant interaction. The management of change as a social activity in Vaara School was discussed earlier, and conflicts arising out of the distribution of authority and responsibilities have already been highlighted.

Although teachers appreciated some aspects of curriculum change, some of them saw the planning stage as time-consuming and did not feel that it was important to their own development. Discussions concerning reform of school work had started well during the planning process: the functions of the school were better understood as a whole, and the parents were invited to participate more actively in discussion as it developed. Teachers learned more about their colleagues' responsibilities and their views and they began to understand each other better during the course of the planning phase. However, the teachers preferred working alone, and, therefore, it was obvious that they held onto their autonomy. Encouraging the pupils to develop more autonomy with the behaviourist teaching method was not indicated by the new Framework. During the research period, one of the action points of the development of Vaara School was finding the balance between autonomy and co-operation.

Teachers interviewed felt that they were doing a good job. In fact, they worked conscientiously, which appeared to be a good starting point for commitment to encourage growth and learning. However, according to Niemi, commitment also requires risk-taking which in consequence leads to innovation and to the discovery of better development opportunities for children. To emphasize the active role of each child in the learning process, activities in the school should be developed further in an attempt to strive for constant improvement. One possibility is that of expanding the notion of workshops to include the concept of pupils as researchers and independent learners. It may be that instead of presenting each piece of information as a fact backed up by authority, chunks of information could be presented as provisional, temporary and open to interpretation.

The dichotomy of social activities of curriculum changes is seen by Habermas as the strategic exercise of authority or as an attempt to reach consensus. However, if the children are considered as a factor in the social

functioning of Vaara School, this would render the Habermas theory as too imprecise to describe events. In Vaara Lower Level Comprehensive School, the writing of the curriculum can be classified as teacher authority in action. Although we may argue that planning should be more consensus based, pedagogic functions can never be totally co-operative, regardless of any claims to the contrary since children at lower levels of the school cannot be considered as equals in dialogue with adults.

In order to make the Habermas theory more relevant to the context of the description of the social functioning of the school, it requires modification to include an idea developed by Latomaa (1994). In the dichotomy model 'authority - consensus' a further level could be place in between: pedagogical action resulting from co-operation between children and adults. Vaara School could move towards a child oriented environment for learning if this pedagogical function was understood and then made concrete. Each school should decide how children's phases of development could be activated by a new approach to privileges and responsibilities related to such a concept of co-operation. However, despite the fact there have been some successful experiments in true co-operational planning between teachers and pupils in the past, the theory is in need of greater research (see Kansanen & Uusikylä 1981).

Seen within the context of the development of the school, the approach to pedagogy described above would involve a diminishing of the features of authority and force with the corresponding encouragement of the emancipation of the child to produce an active and equal individual (Latomaa 1994). Vaara School curriculum could develop further, following the conceptualisation of pedagogic co-operation, into a child oriented, active curriculum based on children's interests. It should contain things to do, not things to learn. Learning should then involve a series of transactions which begin with information seeking, which are communicative and which lead to understanding. This would be in the true spirit of the new theory of learning: to seek the balance between authority and co-operation in the development of the curriculum.

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